LIVED JUSTICE: WOMEN’S SENSES OF JUSTICE, REPARATIONS AND DECISION-MAKING AFTER WARTIME SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN NORTHERN UGANDA

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES
(Interdisciplinary Studies)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)

December 2021

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The following individuals certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies for acceptance, the dissertation entitled:

**Lived Justice: Women’s Senses of Justice, Reparations and Decision-Making after Wartime Sexual Violence in Northern Uganda**

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Abstract

This dissertation centers the lived experiences of women who survived wartime sexual violence and forced marriage during a war in Northern Uganda (1986-2008) between the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) rebels and Uganda’s government. In the post-conflict setting, little information exists on how women decide whether or not to continue forced marriages started in rebel captivity. More so, some fifteen years after the war ended, few feel they have realized justice in a legal sense, despite a successful prosecution of an LRA commander in the International Criminal Court. Drawing on lived experience as knowledge, this qualitative research addressed the following questions: Why do mothers decide to reunite or not with the fathers to their children born of forced marriage and sexual violence? How do women make these decisions? What is the prevailing sense of justice and reparation sought by women who had children from forced marriage? Over a seven months’ period in 2019, interviews, focus groups and storytelling were conducted with sixty-eight participants in Gulu district, northern Uganda.

Most scholarly literature on wartime forced marriages and sexual violence focus on rights-based approaches to justice, limiting it to retribution for a legal wrong; yet women emphasize that justice is pluralistic and exceeds law. This interdisciplinary research develops a theory of lived justice, a holistic sense of justice that enables women, and their children, to live dignified lives after wartime sexual violence and forced marriage. The theory has four intersecting themes. The first theme is place-based justice realizable when women own land to live on. Land fulfills senses of home, identity and belonging. Secondly, compensation-based justice offers recognition of suffering, shattered dreams and time lost in abduction. Thirdly, needs-based justice enables lives of dignity by enhancing women’s livelihoods, children’s education, and housing. The fourth theme is relationship-based justice that involves love, acceptance and recognition of women’s victimhood, citizenship and humanity from their families, communities, and government. These four themes intersect to enable lived justice and contributes knowledge on justice and reparations for wartime sexual and gender-based violence especially literature that reckon with senses of justice.
Lay Summary

This dissertation is about women who were abducted by the Lord’s Resistance Army as young girls and forced to be wives, mothers, porters, and fighters during the Northern Ugandan war (1986-2008). A key question I addressed is ‘what are the senses of justice and reparation for women who survived forced marriage?’ The study also investigated how women decided on what to do with wartime forced marriages. I contribute to the literature on justice and reparations for sexual and gender-based violence, research methods and develop a theory of lived justice. Lived justice is relational, holistic, and lived in the everyday. Senses of justice as lived includes four elements articulated by women: 1-place-based (land); 2-needs-based (housing, education, medical and livelihoods); 3-compensation for suffering and time lost in abduction; and, 4-relationship-based that includes acceptance, recognition, and peaceful co-existence. Senses of justice as lived is relevant for program and policy delivery in Uganda and beyond.
Preface

This research was carried out by me with the guidance of Prof. Erin Baines, Prof. Pilar Riano Alcala and Prof. Sheryl Lightfoot, the support of community-based partners in Uganda and the generosity of women who survived sexual violence and forced marriage who entrusted me with their stories. The research design, implementation- including the field work, analysis and writing was conducted by me, except the validation and dissemination workshop that was done in collaboration with two organizations, Watyer Ki Gen (Angela Atim and Janet Arach) and Women’s Advocacy Network (Evelyn Amony and Moses Komakech).

No part of this dissertation has been published anywhere. A summary of findings was presented to research participants, policy and program experts during a dissertation validation and dissemination workshop conducted on May 31st and June 1st, 2021. A video recording of this presentation was shared with participants. Following this validation workshop, a draft of Chapter One was shared with the International Criminal Court (ICC) Trust Fund for Victims in Uganda after their request to use study results to inform their reparations process related to the case of Dominic Ongwen case concluded in 2021. Results were also summarized in a policy report and a podcast pending completion and dissemination in early 2022. Study results were also presented in various panels and conferences on justice for conflict-period violence.

This research was approved by three research ethics bodies. The University of British Columbia Research Ethics Board (BREB)-reference number H19-01391, the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) reference number SS366ES, and the Gulu University Research Ethics Committee (GUREC) reference number GUREC-074-19.
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<tr>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome</td>
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<tr>
<td>BREB</td>
<td>Behavioural Research Ethics Board</td>
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<td>CAR</td>
<td>Central African Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBC</td>
<td>Children Born in Rebel Captivity</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBO</td>
<td>Community Based Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBOV</td>
<td>Children Born of War</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women</td>
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<td>CND</td>
<td>Canadian Dollars</td>
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<tr>
<td>DRC</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of Congo</td>
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<tr>
<td>FCA</td>
<td>Forced Conjugal Association</td>
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<td>FGD</td>
<td>Focus Group Discussion</td>
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<td>GUREC</td>
<td>Gulu University Research Ethics Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIV</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus</td>
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<td>HSM</td>
<td>Holy Spirit Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Criminal Court</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICD</td>
<td>International Crimes Division (of Uganda’s High Court)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICTR</td>
<td>International Criminal Tribunal of Rwanda</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICTY</td>
<td>International Criminal Tribunal of Yugoslavia</td>
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<tr>
<td>ID</td>
<td>Identity Card</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Persons Camp</td>
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<tr>
<td>JLOS</td>
<td>Justice, Law and Order Sector</td>
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<tr>
<td>JRMP</td>
<td>Justice and Reconciliation Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>KKA</td>
<td>Ker Kwaro Acholi</td>
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<tr>
<td>LCV</td>
<td>Local Councillor Five</td>
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<tr>
<td>LOIC</td>
<td>Letters of Initial Contact</td>
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<tr>
<td>LRA/M</td>
<td>Lord’s Resistance Army/Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP</td>
<td>Member of Parliament</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAADS</td>
<td>The National Agriculture Advisory Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>NRA/M</td>
<td>National Resistance Army/Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRC</td>
<td>Norwegian Refugee Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>PI</td>
<td>Principal Investigator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRDP</td>
<td>Peace, Recovery and Development Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>RUF</td>
<td>Revolutionary United Front</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCSL</td>
<td>Special Court of Sierra Leone</td>
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<tr>
<td>SGBV</td>
<td>Sexual and Gender Based Violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPPGA</td>
<td>School of Public Policy and Global Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSHRC</td>
<td>Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada</td>
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<tr>
<td>TASO</td>
<td>The AIDS Support Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>TJ</td>
<td>Transitional Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRC</td>
<td>Truth and Reconciliation Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UBC</td>
<td>University of British Columbia</td>
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<tr>
<td>UDHR</td>
<td>The Universal Declaration for Human Rights (of 1948)</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNCST</td>
<td>Uganda National Council for Science and Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNLA</td>
<td>Uganda National Liberation Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNSCR</td>
<td>United Nations Security Council Resolution</td>
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<tr>
<td>UPDA</td>
<td>Uganda People’s Democratic Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>UPDF</td>
<td>Uganda People’s Defence Forces</td>
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<td>VSLA</td>
<td>Village Savings and Loan Associations</td>
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<td>WAN</td>
<td>Women’s Advocacy Network</td>
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<td>WFP</td>
<td>World Food Program</td>
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<td>WKG</td>
<td>Watyer Ki Gen</td>
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Acknowledgements

I appreciate the women and stakeholders who participated in this study. Special thanks to members of the Women’s Advocacy Network (WAN) and all women who entrusted me with their stories, without which this research could not happen. Thank you, my elders and Northern Ugandan leaders, stakeholders, and advocates especially Lawirwodi Rwot David Onen Acana II of Ker Kwaro Acholi (KKA) Cultural Institution, the Archbishop of Gulu Archdiocese His Grace Dr. John Baptist Odama, Retired Rev. Bishop Baker Ochola, the LCV Chairperson of Gulu Hon. Ojara Martin Mapenduzi, Woman MP of Gulu Hon. Betty Aol Ocan, Ms. Pamela Angwech, Rev. Fr. Okun Lagoro and Prime Minister of KKA Ambrose Olaa who made time for my research.

Utmost thanks to my co-supervisors Dr. Erin Baines and Dr. Pilar Riano Alcala, and committee member Dr. Sheryl Lightfoot for their incredible mentorship throughout this doctorate. You taught me how to write, analyze and meet scholarly and pragmatic requirements through this research. I could not make it without your generous support. I appreciate my external examiner Dr. Gertrude Mianda and university examiners Dr. Sara Shneiderman, and Dr. Leonora C Angeles for investing their time in assessing this research, and the exams chair Dr. David Morton. I also thank the faculty and staff of Interdisciplinary Studies Graduate Program and the School of Public Policy and Global Affairs especially Enid Ho, Dr. Barbara Weber, Dr. Steven Taubeneck, and Dr. Allison M. Macfarlane. I am grateful for funding from Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarships, UBC Public Scholar’s Initiative with mentorship of Dr. Serbulet Turan, and UBC Graduate Global Leadership Fellowship towards this research. Thanks to the Conjugal Slavery in War Partnership with leadership of Dr. Annie Bunting who provided feedback to drafts.

Special acknowledgements to Ugandan partners-Women’s Advocacy Network (WAN) and Watyer Ki Gen (WKG) who supported the research on the ground. I am indebted to Evelyn Amony and chairpersons of all WAN groups in Gulu for coordinating research activities during fieldwork-apwoyo tutwal. Thank you Angela Atim Lakor and Janet Arach of Watyer Ki Gen for organizing the dissemination workshops. I appreciate my research assistants-Moses Komakech,
Sharon Awor and Charles Okello for the tireless work put in to transcribe data and overall research support. Thanks to my friends- Evelyn Angeyo, Beth Stewart, Julianne Okot Bitek, Omer Aijazi, Carla Suarez, Carolyn Namaganda, Zaira Petruf, Laura Lee, Letha Victor, Ricardo Chapparo, Teddy Atim, Sheila Amito, Doris Maholo Sayde, Wambui Caroline, Alice Murage, Charlotte Birungi, Naomi Nandutu, Grace Abalo, Celina Solis, Tori Otenso, Lydia Karungi, Debbie Kisa, Debbie Ekusai, Margaret Ajok, Agnes Larubi, Sylvia Atim, Jeff Korondo, Isaac Okwir, Grace Acan, Nancy Apiyo, Nancy Abwola, Lindsay McClain, Boniface Ojok, Francisco Gomez, Lillian Wataka, Richard Musoke, Stella Namae, Rebecca Asimwe, Drake Mbowa, Derrick Amone, Christine Adoch, Philipp Schulz, Heather Tasker, Martin Byarugaba, all friends and neighbors.

Thanks to my family, siblings, in-laws, and relatives for your numerous supports. Special thanks to my mother Mary Oywa for everything I cannot put in words. Thanks to my late dad Celsius Oywa who believed in my potential for achieving big dreams. I hope I made you proud! I am forever indebted to my brother Christopher Mwa who wore my dad’s shoes and still gave me pocket money to date. Thank you, Jane Acirio, Christine Okee, Stella Oryang, Roselyn Kipwola, Immaculate Alanyo, Irene Ayo, Patrick Ayella and David Nokrach. Those video calls with your families often made my day amidst challenging pandemic times. Thanks to Charity, Carol, Kenneth, Peter, Roselyn Apiyo, and Victor. Thanks to my partner Denis for his support to me and our daughters. I thank my daughters Elena and Kimberly for being amazing, patient, and loving children who put up with a mum who was juggling work, school, family, and everything amidst a pandemic. I loved taking walks, going to the beaches, camping, dancing, and picnicking with you girls. I would not have managed this doctorate without you. Above all, I thank God.
To Mummy Mary Apoto Oywa and the memories of my Daddy Celsius Anying Oywa
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Rwot Lakica

Under a mango tree, I sat with members of Rwot Lakica women’s group chatting about our lives as we waited for more members to gather for a boko lok (storytelling) on a Saturday afternoon in 2009 in Olayoilong near Gulu town, northern Uganda. Two sets of women were braiding each other’s hair. Another woman arrived with a baby wrapped on her back with obeno (a cloth baby carrier), greeted us, unwrapped the baby and started breastfeeding. Another pair stood a few meters from us as they engaged in a private conversation characterized with joy. They had not seen each other since escaping rebel captivity. These women had survived abduction, sexual violence and forced marriage during the war (1986-2008) between the Ugandan government and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda.²

Once more members had joined, the then Chairperson of Rwot Lakica women’s group, Ms. Evelyn Amony and I co-facilitated the storytelling. In the beginning, some members were reluctant to talk, they were listeners. But after six months, women shared in depth narratives, listened, and responded to each other’s experiences of abduction to the point that they never wanted to stop. Laughter, tears, hair braiding, babysitting, breastfeeding, and hugging characterized every session. These women became the core of my work life as I developed a relationship of sisterhood beyond the fact that I am an Acholi woman, and that we are all war survivors. Acholi is a Luo-speaking ethnic tribe of northern Uganda, a region that was significantly impacted by the war. I reflect further on my relationship with these women and positionality in Chapter Three. When I first met Rwot Lakica women’s group, I had no idea that I would still be engaging with women like them twelve years later.

1 Rwot Lakica is an Acholi phrase that means God is merciful. Members of this group chose this name because they felt that it was God’s mercy that made them survive rebel abduction and return home.

2 Since 1986 northern Uganda experienced a violent conflict. A peace process between 2006-2008 ended the violence in the country but pushed the rebels to neighboring South Sudan, Central African Republic, Chad and the Democratic Republic of Congo, where they reportedly continue operating to date.
As a community-based researcher, I was part of a collaborative research project between The University of British Columbia (UBC) and Rwot Lakica to document their experiences of war. This involved working with different storytelling groups and later, co-founding the Women’s Advocacy Network (WAN), with whom I have continued to work for the past twelve years.³ WAN, an organization that advocates for justice, reparations, and reconciliation, made this research possible. It is led and run by women like members of Rwot Lakica who survived wartime sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). What started under a mango tree underpinned my passion for women, gender, and justice. I met with Rwot Lakica every Saturday for two years to boko lok on wartime captivity experiences and reintegration. These women, to whom I call “participants” henceforth, are the focus of this dissertation.

Over the course of the war between the LRA and the Uganda’s government, more than 60,000 people were abducted by the LRA (Pham, Phuong; Vinck, Patrick; Stover 2007). The majority of abduction victims were children between eight and eighteen years old. For example, on October 9th, 1996, Uganda’s 34th Independence Day, 139 school girls were abducted by the LRA rebels from St. Mary’s College, Aboke (Acan 2017; De Temmerman 2001). The LRA forced abducted girls and women to fight, cook, serve as wives, sex slaves and bear children without their consent (Apio 2016; Baines 2014; Carlson and Mazurana 2008; Opiyo 2013). As Evelyn Amony (2015, 39), a survivor of forced marriage writes in her memoir, ‘if I wanted to live, I had to be his wife.’ Participants reported that resistance was punishable by rape, beating, torture, or death. Similar findings have been reported in past publications (Akello 2013; Apio 2016; Lamwaka 2016; Kiconco 2015).

Almost half of the senior LRA commanders had five or more forced wives each, and half of the wives bore children (Carlson and Mazurana 2008, 25). Women who escaped the LRA returned

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³ Since 2009, I worked with Evelyn Amony and Rwot Lakica to document their stories as part of a UBC Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Standard Research grant on Women and War, that would later lead to our collaboration to help Evelyn and Grace Acan write their memoires. This collaboration led to the formation of the WAN and the Gender Justice Unit at the Justice and Reconciliation Project, a community-based organization in northern Uganda.
with children born of forced marriage to a community that stigmatizes, rejects and blames them for the war (Shanahan and Veale 2016; Opiyo 2013). For example, except for two participants, all women in this study returned with one to four children born in captivity. Children are the centres of participants’ lives, influencing their mothers’ senses of justice that this dissertation discusses. Two participants, Lamaro and Lanyero, were among the 139 girls abducted from St. Mary’s College. While these two did not continue with forced marriages upon returning home, others did, and are raising their children together. How women make these decisions to end or continue forced marriage is a subject this dissertation addresses.

Participants face reintegration and recovery challenges in the communities they returned to such as stigma, rejection, trauma, and the inability to meet their basic needs. Women told stories of these challenges in our boko lok in 2009, and still voiced similar issues during this research in 2019. Despite the work my colleagues and I did in northern Uganda such as storytelling, dialogues, research and advocacy on peace, gender and justice for war-affected communities, no meaningful justice has been attained by participants. Very little information exists on factors that influence women’s decision making on whether or not to reunite with the men they were forced to be with in rebel captivity after they return home. Most literature focus on the need for justice and accountability from a legal perspective, yet justice is a pluralistic concept that exceeds law (Brunnegger and Faulk 2016; Derrida 2002). Participants want to see, as I will show in this dissertation, that the men who harmed them, and the government that failed to protect them, be held accountable in various ways including compensation, provision of land and enhanced abilities to meet their basic needs. Participants described these needs to reflect their senses of justice as lived elaborated in the next section.

Further, since conducting storytelling with Rwot Lakica and all my work in northern Uganda, I observed that formerly abducted women’s senses of justice and reparations were missing from national and international justice debates, yet they often expressed the need to be heard (Acan et al. 2019; Justice and Reconciliation Project 2011). Despite the approved 2019 national
transitional justice (TJ) policy\textsuperscript{4} in Uganda, the risk of further marginalization of women’s voices in TJ remains high. For example, the policy only devoted a brief section on SGBV that does not reflect the magnitude of women and gendered wartime experiences including its silence on male survivors (Schulz 2020).\textsuperscript{5} To address this gap, my research sought to explore in depth women’s senses of justice and reparations while drawing on their lived experiences of wartime SGBV and how that informs their articulation of desired senses of justice as lived, a framework this study establishes. I spent seven months in 2019 in Gulu district, northern Uganda working with sixty-eight total participants\textsuperscript{6} including WAN women and ten members of Rwot Lakica to answer the following research questions: Why do mothers decide to reunite or not with the fathers of their children born of forced marriage and sexual violence? How do they make these decisions? What are the circumstances under which they make these decisions? What is the prevailing sense of justice and reparation sought by women who had children from forced marriage?

This chapter will present a theory of lived justice as a framework that grounds this research, literature reviewed, the justice landscape in northern Uganda and ends with the dissertation layout. Lived justice is an everyday sense of justice that enable women and their children born of war to live dignified lives after wartime sexual violence and forced marriage. Women in this study articulated four intersecting themes that constitute for them, and their children born of war (CBOW), a sense of justice. These themes are discussed in Chapters Five through Seven. The first theme is place-based justice attainable when women own land on which they can live. Land fulfills senses of home, identity and belonging. Secondly, compensation-based justice offers recognition of suffering, shattered dreams and time lost during abduction. The third theme is needs-based justice, achievable through enhancing women’s livelihoods, children’s education, and housing. The fourth theme is relationship-based justice. The experience of abduction affected relationships between women and their families, communities, and government. Women

\textsuperscript{4} Since the peace talks between the Ugandan government and the LRA rebels stalled in 2008, the Justice, Law and Order Sector was tasked to implement some sections of the agreement that included setting up a TJ working group. The working group developed a national TJ policy that was approved by the Ugandan Parliament in 2019 as a framework for addressing consequences of civil wars across Uganda.

\textsuperscript{5} Fifty-nine of these participants were women who survived sexual violence and forced marriage while nine were key informants.
desire a relationship-based justice that involves love, acceptance, and recognition of their victimhood from the society. I argue that these themes merge to enable lived justice for survivors of wartime sexual violence and forced marriage. Lived justice, grounded in survivor’s experiences may be applicable to other post violence contexts. These themes are elaborated in the next section.

![Image](image-url)

**Figure 1: With members of Rwot Lakica women’s group preparing for a storytelling in 2009**

(Photo by Evelyn Amony)

### 1.2 Theoretical Framework

Using an inductive approach, a process where ‘researchers gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than testing hypotheses as in positivist research (Merriam and Tisdell 2016, 17),’ this study develops a lived justice theory. Ideas and understandings that one has gained through their experience with types of people, settings, or phenomenon one studies are a source of concepts and theories for their conceptual framework (Maxwell 2012). The development of this theory is rooted in information gathered in this research, and my nearly two decades’ experience working with women and war-affected communities prior to this study. Lived justice theory emerged as the most appropriate for understanding the women’s calls for
justice that is achievable by provision of place, compensation, support to meet basic needs like housing and children’s education, and harmonious relationships with people and institutions around participants. Therefore, the theory of lived justice emanated from women’s narratives of lived experiences of forced marriage and sexual violence and how these experiences continue to shape their present lives.

Participants’ senses of justice as lived departed from the conventional and rights-based concept of justice as something primarily achievable through legal prosecutions. Literature demonstrates that justice is pluralistic (Brunnegger and Faulk 2016) and a theory of justice as lived builds on and affirms this literature given its plural nature. Retributive justice prioritizes legal prosecutions, while the women asked for land, housing, loving, and accepting relationships, and compensation as core intersecting components of justice. As I will show in the paragraphs below, place-based, needs-based, relationship-based, and compensation-based justice intersect to enable lived justice after wartime sexual violence and forced marriage.

The persistent calls for acknowledgement of failure to protect by the government and harm endured, recognition of victimhood and citizenship, ending stigma and desiring to be loved and accepted by the community women returned to are components of relationship-based justice. These are forms of justice that, according to participants, can be achieved in their interactions and quality of relationships with others in their everyday lives post violence. No possible monetary value can be attached to relationship-based justice. For example, love, acceptance, and recognition cannot be quantified in monetary forms. It is a non-tangible sense of justice that can be fulfilled by those around women like their immediate family members such as husbands, children, in-laws, parents, and friends; their communities particularly the Acholi people; the religious, traditional and government leaders in their localities at the district level; and national level government leaders with authority to assure the women and their children of citizenship and recognise their victimhood. It is a notion of justice that extends from the administrators of justice both traditional and western, to the realms outside the formal justice mechanisms.
While there are hardly any monetary values that can be attached to relationship-based justice, human nature and attitude towards others make it costly to achieve. People who experience wartime violence have a hard time accepting the victimhood of women and their children. This bitterness, poverty, grief of losing loved ones presumably killed by the women’s husbands, make it harder for communities to forgive, accept and love these women and their children wholeheartedly. Yet without love, acknowledgement and harmony, women remain dissatisfied and continue longing for relationship-based justice. This finding is in agreement with the concept of social harmony examined by Kamari Clark (2009). Clarke noted that justice in Acholi cosmology, where an individual’s actions have consequences for the broader community, ‘is a means of restoring social relations.’ Acholi traditional justice ceremonies such as mato oput, contribute to social harmony among the conflicting parties. In Clarke’s analysis, the point of mato oput is not to punish but restore social harmony within affected communities. The women in this study however expanded the concept of social harmony to include not only human relationships within communities and families, but institutions of governance as well.

Additionally, nearly every participant asked for a place-based kind of justice through access to land. Their calls for land were articulated in views that land is home, livelihood, healing, and a cultural identity for them and their children. Since Acholi is a patrilineal society, many of the women who remain single yet with children born of SGBV lack land. Land in Acholi defines one’s sense of identity and belonging and it is a key asset since farming is the main economic activity. Women whose “husbands” died or remained in the bush or returned but rejected them, called for a place-based kind of justice. Even participants that reunited with commanders as will be discussed in Chapter Four still asked for land because their “husbands” were denied their own ancestral lands. These denials are connected to men’s perceived willingness to be in rebel captivity for a long time and blame for harming civilians. As will be presented in Chapter Two, one of the main impacts of the war in northern Uganda was an explosion of land grabbing and conflicts at family and communal levels. This has left women with nowhere to call home,

7 Mato oput directly translates as ‘drinking the bitter roots.’ It is a traditional reconciliation ceremony that involves the clans of the perpetrator and the victim mediated by a council of elders. See the section of this chapter on justice landscape for further details on this and other traditional justice ceremonies in Acholi.
belong, farm, and live their lives, hence their calls for a place-based justice that will ultimately contribute to their healing from harm.

Another component of lived justice that participants articulated, is what I termed needs-based justice. The majority of women expressed the needs for decent housing, education for their children born in captivity (CBC), employment and medical support. Their children’s education is their priority. Participants argued that since they were unable to complete their studies, they want to achieve these education dreams in their children and to secure a bright future. Women noted that their children will in turn support them in their senior ages. Some women asked for stable employment as they felt legal prosecutions may not solve their sufferings. If the women’s needs are met, they will feel satisfied, fit in the community, gain a sense of belonging and break the cycle of poverty and marginalization presented as one of the causes of the war in Chapter Two. At the core of needs-based justice is women’s aspirations of being able to afford and live dignified lives.

Compensation-based justice is closely linked to needs-based justice. The study understands compensation as giving either material or monetary payments to participants who survived wartime forced marriage and sexual violence. I argue that compensation offers recognition for lost dreams, suffering endured and time lost in captivity. Compensation in this sense, is only a portion of reparations. This plea for compensation is directed to the government on the grounds that it had a responsibility to protect. The women’s request for compensation is not only for the harm of sexual violence and forced marriage, but for the years they lost when in captivity. None of the participants in this study asked to be paid for forced marriage or sexual violence. They asked for payment for *kare wa ma obale I amak* (our time lost in captivity) and *pi can ma wadeno ilum* (pain endured in the bush). This compensation for time lost was demonstrated by the women’s demands for being given a pension-like scheme that they can earn for either a certain period or for all their remaining lives. Or to be given land as compensation so that they can live on, with their children. This drives this sense of justice back home to the theory of lived justice. Compensation will enhance women’s ability to meet basic needs and live lives of dignity.
Moreover, lived justice theory may not only apply to survivors of sexual violence and forced marriage, but also, various forms of gender-based violence experienced by women, men, girls, and boys both in conflict and in “peaceful” times. For example, needs-based justice that involves enhancement of abilities to meet every day human needs are applicable to many situations of surviving violence. Women who suffered internal displacement in northern Uganda, and young girls who dropped out of school due to early marriage and extraneous living conditions in the internally displaced persons’ (IDP) camps in northern Uganda would find lived justice crucial in their recovery from such gendered violence. Like the formerly abducted women who were the study’s focus, girls who were victims of early marriage in the camps have children that need descent homes to live and school fees. Further, the war-affected communities in northern Uganda and beyond may find lived justice theory useful as a concept that better captures their experience and understanding of justice.

As Chapter Four shows, factors that influenced women’s decisions to reunite with men perceived to be perpetrators are intertwined with their senses of justice as lived. For example, the majority of participants reunited with the men because they needed land to stay with their children (place-based justice); they wanted their children to have a sense of identity, they had been rejected by their relatives and communities, and felt ignored by the government, they had forgiven and mercifully fallen in love with the men (relationship-based justice); and they wanted the children’s paternal clans to pay education and meet their needs and their children’s since they are responsible for causing their suffering (needs-based). Those who rejected the men felt they deserved to choose a man, be married traditionally, and recognised in their marital homes, some felt the men were too old and would be embarrassing for them to be their husbands or that they tortured them while still in captivity and rejected them upon returning home. These are aspects of relationship-based justice that are linked to women’s aspirations to have an age-appropriate, and loving husband who is accepted by their families and communities, and to access resources like land in their marital homes.

All in all, this theoretical framework emerged from the stories told by women and their interpretations of these experiences in relation to their decision making and senses of justice that
this dissertation discusses. Lived justice is a form of justice that can be pursued alongside other justice mechanisms both locally and internationally given that it not only focuses on the harm of sexual violence and forced marriage in war, but also, everyday life. The framework also demonstrates that a single measure cannot redress harms women endured, but a holistic and relational justice process that exists in the everyday, enabling women to live dignified and morally acceptable lives. Next, I turn to reviewing the existing literature.

1.3 Literature Review

This interdisciplinary dissertation draws on wartime forced marriage and sexual violence literature especially how justice and reparations are conceptualized and defined by survivors. Research on wartime sexual violence has been ongoing for decades. But wartime forced marriage only gained traction when it was categorized as a war crime and crime against humanity during the work of the Special Court of Sierra Leone (SCSL) in 2000. In this section, I discuss how transitional justice (TJ) has approached issues of women and war including the experience of sexual violence and forced marriage as published in the literature. I also discuss how justice is conceived in the literature given this research is about senses of justice and reparations. I engage with literature on kinship, harmony, and justice pluralism. By developing a lived justice theory that combines the four themes discussed, this study expands literature on justice for wartime SGBV particularly women and war, and literature that reckons with senses of justice. The study also contributes to literature on northern Uganda as detailed in Chapter Two and makes methodological contribution to qualitative research methods given its longitudinal nature grounded in lived experience as foundations for knowledge development. I conceptually develop an idea of justice as holistic and lived in the everyday.

1.3.1 Wartime Sexual Violence and Forced Marriage

Forced marriage and sexual violence are global phenomena used as war tactics in Nigeria (Zenn and Pearson 2014), Sierra Leone (Coulter 2008), Rwanda (Kalra 2001), Cambodia (Toy-Cronin 2010; O’Brien 2016), and Uganda (Akello 2013; Baines 2014). A 2010 study on girls’ lives
during and after war found that ‘girls are part of government militias or armed opposition forces in 55 countries, were involved in armed conflicts in 38 countries, and fighters in 34 countries between 1990-2003 (Mckay and Mazurana 2004, 14).’ In Rwanda, for example, over 500,000 women were raped in 1994 (Scanlon and Muddell 2010, 14) and sexual violence was also used as a tool for genocide in Guatemala (Crosby and Lykes 2011, 461). In Sierra Leone, ninety-four percent of women in displaced households experienced sexual violence (Scanlon and Muddell 2010, 28) and sixty percent of girls in a 2010 study on ‘girls in fighting forces’ served as “wives” to the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone (Mckay and Mazurana 2004).

Historically, approximately 200,000 young women from Korea, Japan and Philippines were forcefully kept as sex slaves in comfort stations created by the Japanese military (Min 2003; Yoshimi 2000). As these statistics show, the use of women and girls’ bodies for sex, labor and reproduction have characterized past and contemporary conflicts.

To add, studies show that fighters intentionally abduct women for the purposes of rape, procreation, and labor (Akello 2013; Apio 2016; Baaz and Stern 2013; Boesten 2007; Carlson and Mazurana 2008; Kramer 2014; Mckay and Mazurana 2004; O’Brien 2016). In Cambodia, for example, the Khmer Rouge regime had a forced marriage policy intended to reproduce and increase the population to meet the labor needs of the agrarian revolution (Toy-Cronin 2010) while militia leaders in Rwanda forcefully took women as wives during the 1994 genocide (Kalra 2001). Abducted girls were used as rewards and symbols of high status in rebel groups and civil wars post Cold War in the 1990s (Annan et al. 2009; Baines 2014; Kramer 2014; Kiconco 2015; Park 2006; Yoshimi 2000; Zoe 2014). In northern Uganda, sexual violence, forced marriage and forced pregnancy by the LRA were intended to create a new generation of ethnic Acholi (Baines 2014; 2016). Moreover, an estimated 10,000 girls became forced young mothers due to LRA abductions between 1988 and 2004 (Akello 2013). In another research on northern Uganda, it was found that eighty-two percent of girls in the sample were forcibly given to commanders as wives (Kiconco 2015). The LRA leader, Joseph Kony, reportedly had over forty wives while his commanders had an average of five each (Carlson and Mazurana 2008). But these acts violated the customary practices of marriage and courtship in Acholi, Teso, West
Nile and Lango sub regions (Apio 2016; Baines 2014). All participants of this study survived sexual violence and forced marriage while held as captives by the rebels in northern Uganda.

Still, forced marriage and sexual violence have been condemned and efforts have been made to address them legally and internationally. The 1948 Universal Declaration for Human Rights (UDHR), Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Rome Statute recognize and condemn sexual violence and forced marriage. Specifically, Article 16 of the UDHR states ‘marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending parties’ (United Nations General Assembly 1948), and Article 16 (1) (b) of CEDAW (United Nations General Assembly 1979) states that ‘men and women must equally have the same right freely to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent.’ Similarly, Article 7 of the ICC’s Rome Statute lists crimes that can be prosecuted but does not explicitly mention forced marriage, instead, it talks of sexual slavery (Christensen 2016). The Nuremberg and Tokyo trials were silent on wartime sexual violence but the International Criminal Tribunal of Yugoslavia (ICTY) and International Criminal Tribunal of Rwanda (ICTR) set precedents in trials and recognition of sexual violence as a war crime and crime against humanity (Boesten 2007; Carlson and Mazurana 2008). However, no statute of any tribunal includes forced marriage as a distinct crime except the jurisprudence developed by the SCSL (O’Brien 2016). In a related vein, the United Nations Women, Peace and Security agenda to protect and promote women’s rights and increase their participation at all levels of society marked twenty years by the time of writing this dissertation since its inception. While there has been commendable progress, full realization of this agenda has been slow. Given all these historic initiatives, one would expect that fighters should respect women during and after war but that has not been the case as the experiences of abducted Ugandan women show. Of concern is how legal and scholarly responses and documentation of women’s suffering have been biased with assumptions that women and girls who experience war lack agency. I turn to this subject in the next section.
1.3.2 Naming Harm

We should not call it marriage because it is child rape and it is a child and [in] our tradition, you don’t marry a child. You marry an adult and why do you call it marriage? Maybe it should be called child cohabiting because when you call it marriage then you make it official…. That should not be the case because in the first place it shouldn’t have happened, and all the authorities wherever they are, they should have stopped it…. For example, what happened with the LRA, what kind of marriage took place? Nothing like marriage took place. You cannot marry during war.⁸

Who has the power to name harms endured during war? I purposefully kept both forced marriage and sexual violence as separate harms in this dissertation.⁹ But I am quite uncomfortable with using the term “marriage” as it is misleading and does not fully capture women’s experiences in this case. This study engaged with women who do not view their experiences as marriage. Key informant interviews with cultural leaders like the one quoted above and women’s rights organizations in Gulu also disagreed with the term marriage. Instead, informants suggested the experience could be called forced cohabitation or child cohabitation. Reviewed literature present irreconcilable arguments on whether or not, the experience of women like the participants in this study should be called forced marriage or sexual slavery. Authors argue that forced marriage is different from sexual slavery for various reasons. According to Melanie O’Brien, (2016) the definition focus should be the intention of the perpetrator and the victim’s experience that includes an exclusive conjugal relationship even without a formal ceremony. To add, Carlson and Mazurana (2008) noted that referring to women in the LRA as sex slaves is a mistake because the component of conjugality and forced imposition of the status of marriage absent from sexual slavery are central components of forced marriage. They further argued that it is inadequate to merely prosecute rebel commanders on the basis of specific constituent deeds in forced marriage like rape, sexual slavery, enforced pregnancy, forced labour, and enslavement, and stressed that forced marriage becomes a categorized crime in international law (See also Kalra 2001). This is because the experience of being forced to live like a wife to a rebel commander has social and psychological consequences for women who continue to be

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⁸ Key informant interview with the Paramount Chief (Lawirwodi) of Acholi, Gulu, October 21st, 2019.
stigmatized by civilians as rebel wives in the aftermath of war. It is an aspect of their suffering that prosecution do not fully address.

Nevertheless, while sexual slavery may be present in forced marriage, it is not a dominating feature, so it is inaccurate to classify forced marriage purely as a sexual offence but seeing it as “other inhumane acts” may be more applicable given it sets precedence for prosecuting other gender-based crimes (Jain 2008; Slater 2012) such as forced pregnancy. For example, in February 2021, the ICC convicted former LRA commander Dominic Ongwen of forced pregnancy alongside forced marriage (Maliti 2021; The International Criminal Court 2021). I agree with these authors that forced marriage should be seen as a distinct crime from sexual slavery but would prefer calling it “forced relationships” or agree with my informants that it should be “forced cohabitation.” Cohabitation is a term used in Uganda to refer to a situation where a man and a woman live together like husband and wife without any formal marriage. These relationships may or may not lead to the birth of children. It is similar to what is called a “common-law” relationship in Canada. “Forced cohabitation” may be a better term to reflect the women’s experiences because no formal marriages took place in captivity. In the absence of war, a relationship ceases to be a cohabiting one when the couple formally get married.

Further, comfort women10 forced into sex with different Japanese soldiers during the Second World War (Min 2003) are different from forced marriage survivors as a woman is forced to be a “wife” to one man as was the case with the LRA and Revolutionary United Front (RUF) (Apio 2016; Carlson and Mazurana 2008). Rights-based scholars’ and advocates’ preference to use “sexual slavery” instead of forced marriage is due to the emotional response it generates, forced marriage may be interpreted as arranged marriages that have less sensations (Kramer 2014) and is inaccurate in describing the violations women suffer. But sensationalism and too much focus on the sexual element of slavery assumes that women’s experiences are only sexual. Categorizing forced marriage as a sexual crime reinforces the notion that ‘sexual violence is a

10 During World War II, women were forcefully kept by Japanese soldiers in camps where they were repeatedly raped, tortured, and forced to have abortions. (See for example, Sarah Soh’s (2008) work with comfort women). These women became commonly known as “comfort women.”
weapon of war,’ and ignores non-sexual harms like forced labour, beatings, forced combat service and emotional torture that study participants endured during war.

According to Salome Chiseche Mibenge (2013, 164), ‘the legal and juristic lens of transitional justice has produced names like “sex slave” that depoliticize women irreparably. Names create reality.’ By the legal narrative coming up with names such as sex slaves, survivors find themselves in situations where they either have to accept that they were sex slaves or refuse the system of redress such as courts that may be made to respond to their suffering. Study participants are seen as “sex slaves” or “bush wives” of LRA commanders, yet these are names they do not use to describe their experiences. It is important for post conflict systems to use names that do not further disempower survivors after so much power had been reaped from them during the experiences of sexually violent crimes. Still, debates over what to call this harm should remind scholars, practitioners, and policy makers to ask survivors their opinions on how their suffering should be named. Omissions of survivors lead to failure of well-intentioned recovery and redress initiatives. So the naming and conceptualization of forced marriage remains problematic (Kiconco 2015; Oosterveld 2011).

Further, Kiconco Allen’s (2015) participants in Uganda described their experiences by using phrases like, ‘I was forced to live with this man,’ or ‘I had to be with him to survive.’ This study found similar descriptions. Participants never used marriage to describe their experiences. One of them had this to say: ‘I would not call it marriage but a soldier’s way of life. It could not be marriage because they did not ask my parents for my hand [in marriage]. I was abducted. Back home, my parents did not know that I had a husband in captivity. I would not call it marriage.’

Other participants called their experiences maa I wii kica (love on top of mercy), ‘living like husband and wife,’ ‘the man I lived with,’ mak tektek (abduction), and amak ikare me mony (wartime abduction). Women’s emphasis on their experience to be called “abduction” adds another layer of abuse, deprivation of freedom that goes beyond sexual violence and forced marriage. The onset of harm experienced commenced with women’s and girls’ abduction by the

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11 Interview with Ms. Evelyn Amony, Chairperson of Women’s Advocacy Network, formerly Chairperson of Rwot Lakica women’s group, Gulu, October 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 2019.
rebels. Further, there is stigma of being branded “rebel women,” blaming women for complicity with the rebels and viewing them and their children born of war as guilty of crimes rebels committed (Akello 2013; Baines 2014; Coulter 2008; Jain 2008). A call to an end of this stigma has been fronted as a sense of justice for study participants, yet justice making institutions are producing names like sex slaves that serve the complete opposite and narrowly categorize women within a restricted space or type of experience.

Furthermore, names like “bush wives,” “bush marriages,” or forced marriage make the “marriages” real, silence survivors to come out due to the stigmatizing elements in those labels and the fact that they don’t consider their relationships with the rebels “marriage.” According to Chiseche Mibenge (2013), the legal narrative generated and solidified the experience of bush marriages in Sierra Leone and left women with few choices but to continue with the relationship or negate their whole abduction experience to get away from the pejorative title of “bush bride.” She continued to note that rights-based approach to forced marriage creates a challenging account of marriage as a harsh institution for women yet women practice agency in these social structures (Mibenge 2013). Another study found that the designation of wife was harmful to women in N. Uganda but it did not fit the common understanding of sexual violence crimes (Bunting and Quirk 2017). This is because survivors don’t view their experience of forced marriage as sexual violence. I observed in my past work with Ugandan women that they referred to the first sexual encounter with the rebels as “rape” and not the consequent ones especially if she spent several years in abduction. So, survivors of wartime forced marriage may or may not agree with the characterization of their experience as slavery or the distinction drawn between forced marriage and sexual slavery (Bunting, Lawrance, and Roberts 2016; Oosterveld 2011).

However, scholars argued that the phrase “forced conjugal association” (FCA) reflects women’s experiences better than forced marriage. For example, Benjamin N Lawrance (2017, 99) argued that ‘forced conjugal association better captures the complexities of what is called forced marriage in Asylum claims.’ FCA first emerged in the Special Court of Sierra Leone’s distinction of forced marriage from sexual slavery. Justice Doherty’s dissenting opinion on Prosecutor v. Brima in Sierra Leone, stressed that ‘the crucial element of forced marriage is the
imposition of, by threat or physical force arising from the perpetrator’s words or other conduct, of a forced conjugal association by the perpetrator over the victim’ (Christensen 2016, 1831). Christensen continues to elaborate that despite significant overlap between forced marriage and sexual slavery, the Appeals Chamber in Sierra Leone underscored two distinctions: 1-in addition to sexual relations, there was forced conjugal association: and, 2-forced marriage implies a relationship of exclusiveness between husband and wife. Additionally, Monika Satya Kalra (2001) noted that forced marriage encompasses rape, sexual violence, forced impregnation, and sexual slavery but its effect on victims spread afar from these singular crimes.

In contrast, Toy-Cronin Bridgette (2010, 544) writes, ‘the crime must be limited only to the conferral of the status of marriage and ongoing effects that status has on the victim whether male or female, if the crime encompasses other conduct within these “marriages” for example, rape, slavery, or torture, the jurisprudence will not be enriched but will instead serve the perpetrator’s aim of veiling criminal conduct with the term “marriage.”’ She interpreted this as a victory for perpetrators. In fact, the wording of forced marriage obscures the experience of sexual violence and domestic slavery (Park 2006). I argue that the use of the term marriage and arguing that it encompasses other crimes explains why the LRA and the RUF used it as a strategy to avoid legal charges on individual crimes within marriage after war. Cognizant that the harm women and girls experience in war are variously given names like forced marriage, sexual slavery, rape, and sexual violence, among others, it is crucial for us to listen to their stories and attend to their needs instead of ignoring the knowledge and power they have in naming and defining their experiences in their own words. For example, naming abduction as a significant harm beyond sexually related crimes.

1.3.3 Transitional Justice and Sexual Violence

Both formal and informal approaches in various parts of the world have been adopted to address women’s experiences of war. Globally, transitional justice mechanisms have been implemented by states and civil society at grassroots, national and international levels to address conflict-period violence. The 2010 Tribunal of Conscience for Women Survivors of Sexual Violence was
conducted in Guatemala (Crosby and Lykes 2011), and the Women’s International Tribunal on Japanese Sexual Slavery (Chinkin 2001) are examples of civil society-led initiatives while the Special Court of Sierra Leone (Oosterveld 2011), the International Criminal Tribunal of Rwanda (ICTR) and truth commissions conducted in South Africa (1995), Ghana (2002), and Liberia (2007) (Scanlon and Muddell 2010) are formal processes. The recent conviction of a former LRA commander Dominic Ongwen by the ICC demonstrates an international level redress mechanism. SGBV was prevalent during and after war with effects continuing to-date in these societies.

Women have been silenced in mechanisms that are put in place to respond to violent conflicts-including justice and reparations initiatives. For example, Fiona Ross’ study of the South African Truth and Reconciliation revealed that it focused narrowly on women’s experiences of SGBV (2010) that reinforces women’s experiences as only sexual and omits non-sexual harms endured. Scholars have also written about legal mechanisms’ silencing of women’s experiences (Kelsall and Stepakoff 2007; Simic 2018). Yet article 1 of the UNSCR 1325 (2000) ‘urges member states should ensure increased representation of women at all decision making levels…and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict.’ Still, women have been the majority giving testimonies in over forty TRCs in the 20-21st century despite a view that ‘women don’t speak’(Crosby and Lykes 2011). For example fifty-four percent of the 16,885 testimonies gathered in Peru were conveyed by women (Duggan et al. 2008, 204). But large numbers of women active in formal justice and post war processes do not necessarily mean redress of their gendered experiences as they tend to talk of the victimization of loved ones, not their own, as was also the case in South Africa (Ross 2003). In Guatemala, some women reportedly chose to remain silent in the truth process as an agentic act (Rosser 2015) yet ‘a refusal to speak in terms that do not do justice to the self may be read as silence or even a moral failure’ (Ross 2003, 163). This silence is sometimes imposed because, as Jelke Boesten (2014) noted, women who testify become visibly branded with rape, and their victimhood is sexualized in ways that disregards their agency, struggle and political claims.
Studies also show that formal justice and postwar processes such as truth commissions or prosecutions perceive sexual violence as a women’s issue, sees women as passive victims in need of male rescue, and gives sexual violence more attention compared to other gendered harms (Bueno-Hansen 2010; Buckley-Zistel and Stanley 2011; Franke 2014; Patterson-Markowitz, Oglesby, and Marston 2012). ‘Sexual harm is reified as the gendered face of war’ (Crosby and Lykes 2011, 462), but gender crimes are not only sexual (Theidon 2007) neither is it only forced marriage. However, positioning women as merely victims erases their agency and indicates lack of recognition of their endurance of violence and various roles played during conflict as warriors, heroes, political allies, spies and liberators (Boesten 2014; Borer 2009; Buckley-Zistel and Stanley 2011; Coulter 2009; 2008; Crosby and Lykes 2011; Franke 2014; Oyewumi 2011; Ross 2010). For example women in Sierra Leone and Uganda were both victims and perpetrators and have reportedly exercised agency (Baines 2016; Coulter 2008; Mckay and Mazurana 2004). Likewise, women in Peru participated in the defense of their communities, their families and themselves (Theidon 2007), and ‘women’s roles as activists were absent from Guatemalan commission reports, they were mostly featured as embodied victims’ (Rosser 2015, 72). Evelyn Amony is often referred to as dako pa Kony, (Kony’s wife) even when she goes to meetings as an advocate for women’s rights. Her victimhood as a warlord’s wife overshadows her role as a women’s leader and advocate for WAN members.

Finally, a study on women and war in northern Uganda found that the stigma suffered by women was because of their conjugal relationship with the rebels, not that they were fighters (Baines 2011). Other studies show that women’s marginalization in TJ is related to their absence from events that lead to establishment of these mechanisms such as peace talks (Bell and O’Rourke 2007; Scanlon and Muddell 2010). But Vasuki Nesiah (2006) noted that even if women are included in peace talks, they risk being sidelined at participation level in TJ processes. Women are excluded yet they are the best to articulate their justice and reparations needs. Next, I turn to reparations literature.
### 1.3.4 Reparation

Reparation is another key concept this study focused on. It serves to publicly acknowledge wrong, restore dignity of survivors, provide compensation, restitution and rehabilitation, and guarantees of non-repetition (Duggan et al. 2008; Rubio-Marín and de Greiff 2007). Despite these well intentioned goals of reparations, most TJ resources have been used on the rehabilitation of ex-fighters, establishment of formal truth commissions and tribunals (Walker 2016). It is the primary responsibility of governments to provide reparations (International Federation for Human Rights 2007), but reparations is an underfunded mechanism in transitional justice (TJ) even if it is critical to gender justice (Scanlon and Muddell 2010). Still, women have been ignored by states including the study participants. For example, since 2014 when these women petitioned Ugandan Parliament for reparations,¹² nothing has been done to-date despite a promise to act by the government.

Additionally, economic reasons drive women to participate in TJ because they are part of the majority poor who are often the last to benefit from reparations.¹³ Literature on gender sensitive reparations suggests that it should address structural barriers prior to the war, it shouldn’t only restore but transform (Duggan et al. 2008; International Federation for Human Rights 2007). This kind of reparation has been termed transformative reparations. ‘Transformative reparations insists that reparations must aim at reconstruction of economic, social and political relations that oppress and expose women to violations’ (Walker 2016, 109). Economic, social and political relations are conditions that do not only expose women to sexual violence during war, but also intersect to influence their decision making in the aftermath. As you will read in Chapter Four, social, economic, and political conditions influenced women to either continue or stop the forced marriages with the LRA rebel commanders in Uganda. Meaningful TJ should go beyond dealing with past rights violations, but address and transform underlying inequalities that reinforced the

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¹² The Women’s Advocacy Network, with support of local organizations, cultural and religious leaders presented a petition to Ugandan Parliament for reparation for them and their children. Their demands included similar issues raised in this research such as compensation, children’s education, and medical support among others.

¹³ For example, participation in TJ includes providing testimonies in truth commission hearings or legal prosecutions.
violence (Buckley-Zistel and Stanley 2011; Patterson-Markowitz, Oglesby, and Marston 2012; Ross 2010). TJ processes in Uganda should incorporate lived justice as a framework for holistically addressing women’s justice and reparations needs as women articulated in this dissertation.

Considering this literature, I argue that reparation is a form of justice as women’s narratives indicate. This is because, land (or place-based justice), compensation, and needs-based justice are intertwined with reparations. In robust reparation programs, compensation is paid to victims of war by the State. In the absence of such reparation initiatives in Uganda, participants succinctly told me that they will feel justice has been served when they are compensated. To add, once compensation is given to survivors of sexual violence and forced marriage, whether monetary or in kind, it will enhance women’s abilities to meet their basic needs. To some participants, as you will read in the coming chapters, compensation alone could fulfill their justice needs.

Furthermore, participants’ relationship-based senses of justice articulated in calls for recognition of victimhood and citizenship, acknowledgment of suffering, and acceptance by families and communities are arguably processes of reparation after war. But women named these processes as forms of justice. Therefore, the flipside of this argument holds true as well. That is, justice is also perceived as reparations by participants. When all or some of the senses of justice that participants mentioned are provided, women will feel justice has been served. The line between reparations and justice are not clearly drawn by the women as both seem to reinforce and lead to the fulfilment of the other. Justice leads to reparations, and reparations leads to justice. It does not matter which one comes first or what name is accorded to these concepts because to the women, either or both mechanisms serve the same purpose: the achievement of lived justice.

The argument that reparations is justice and vice versa is similar to conventional transitional justice approaches that perceives reparations as a TJ redress process linked to formal prosecutions or truth commissions. Both reparations and prosecutions are two different mechanisms with close linkages. For example, reparations are often ordered as results or
recommendations from legal prosecutions or truth telling in TJ. But attaching reparations to prosecution alone omit participants who want reparations but do not wish to participate in trials or truth telling. During the present study, I asked the following questions (see appendix B): 1) What does justice look like for you?; and, 2) what does reparation look like for you? These two questions often generated the same responses from participants, which centered on reparations. This brings me to conclude that survivors of SGBV view justice and reparations as the same process aimed at achieving lived justice. A key effect of SGBV is the birth of children that establishes kinship ties among alleged victims, perpetrators, and their communities in ways that make women desire processes (justice and reparation) that enable their lives to go on. I discuss justice pluralism (defined below) and senses of justice in the next section that are foundational to women’s narratives on what justice is for them and their children.

1.3.5 Justice Pluralism and Senses of Justice

Brunnegger and Faulk (2016) noted that justice is narrowly viewed through the legal lens and formal mechanisms, but legal anthropologists emphasize that justice needs to include informal ways of solving violence. They say, ‘the idea of justice is not a singular, universal idea but a complex, locally variable, and ever-changing concept’ (Brunnegger and Faulk 2016, 4). Brunnegger and Faulk referred to this variability as “justice pluralism.” Justice pluralism, according to them is ‘the co-existence of a plurality of meanings, ideas, and experiences attached to justice within spatial settings, scales, and layers’ (2016, 4). The meanings, ideas, and experiences of justice to the women in this study are connected to land, basic needs, compensation, and harmonious relationships. This affirms that justice is, indeed, pluralistic as reported by Brunnegger and Faulk. For the study participants, their senses of justice revolve around enabling their daily lives to go on after the violence, a lived justice.

Additionally, Jacques Derrida (2002) noted that law is not justice because justice exceeds law. Derrida (2002) asserts that ‘justice is never done, it never achieves a moment of closure, rather it is a permanently deferred, always “to come,” a utopian moment of anticipation.’ Derrida (2002) further noted that justice cannot be a temporal event that can be periodized. This further helps us
to understand women’s calls for lived justice as it is something they need to live the rest of their lives. Women in this research do not only need a temporal event such as a legal verdict, but they also need harmonious, unconditional, and accepting relationships, and peaceful co-existence with everyone around them. Another example that illustrates the impossibility of periodizing justice are the children born of these forced marriages. They are here for life and most decisions of the women to continue relationships with the children’s fathers have revolved around the children— that further complicates legal justice.

My findings also build on Kamari Clark’s (2009) view that the ICC has re-established what justice means by prosecuting only a few individuals. I argue that the ICC’s approach, even if significant, may not immediately translate to meeting the daily needs of women like tuition for their children and land that shift meanings of justice from formal court spaces to the everyday lives. Relatively, Kimberly Theidon (2007) suggested that justice can be a reallocation of resources. She made this argument considering her work with women in Peru who consistently expressed the desire for scholarships for their children, housing, and food. To women, this is often what their sense of justice represents. My study builds upon these literatures by developing a lived justice theory. I argue that lived justice not only advances the view that justice is pluralistic, but also demonstrates possibilities of justice realizable in the everyday realms of participant’s lives after experiencing wartime sexual violence and forced marriage. The senses of justice articulated by participants are particularly relevant in the northern Ugandan context where there is complexity of victimhood and perpetration of harm.

Furthermore, as you will read in Chapter Two, children, including participants of this study were abducted, trained, indoctrinated, and forced to fight against their own communities. The line between who is a victim and who is a perpetrator is unclear, yet legal justice needs this demarcation. Moreover, women have returned with children born of sexual violence and forced marriage. The so called “perpetrators” in these situations are fathers of their children and are husbands to some of the women who reunited and formalized their marriages upon returning home from rebel captivity. This makes me argue that lived justice is significant for the women’s circumstances where the goal is to engage in a system that lets them, and their children live on
with all their needs met and without the worry of navigating the webs of kinship that they are already trapped in.

1.3.6 Kinship and Social Harmony

Following extensive ethnographic research with civilians raped by other civilians in Uganda, Holly Porter (2013) argued that Acholi notions of appropriate punishment are guided by understanding of the act of wrongdoing itself and by the degree to which the perpetrator is considered to be important to future social harmony, ‘a shared and highly valued ideal in Acholi society, [which] denotes a state of ‘normal’ relations among the living and the dead, an idea of cosmological equilibrium, and social balance of power and moral order’ (Porter 2013, 3). It is because of the social interconnectedness that several studies state that the impact of forced marriage and sexual violence is felt by not only the primary victim, but the entire community (Apio 2016; Carlson and Mazurana 2008). The patriarchal nature of the society creates dependencies that complicate women’s choices post abduction. Upon exiting abduction, women find themselves entangled in negotiating decisions on what to do regarding their pain in light of a very high value placed on social harmony while there is also a lack of trust in justice institutions designed to address their suffering (Porter 2013). For example, some women decided to continue marriages from the LRA due to the stigma of single mothers in Acholi and norms that children belong to their fathers. Grace Akello (2013) found that, one core factor hindering reintegration for forced mothers and their children were their kinship with the LRA fighters. This is because the war-affected people stigmatize and blame the women and their children for the harms they endured in the hands of rebel commanders with whom they are akin. To add, since children “belong” to their fathers in Acholi culture, they carry their father’s perceived blame. Yet social institutions are critical in shaping women’s choices in the aftermath of war (Apio 2016). Study participants agreed with these authors that their kinship with rebels continue to affect their recovery and reintegration even ten to twenty years after exiting captivity. As you will read in Chapter Seven, relationship-based justice as articulated by participants is situated in the concept of social harmony and kinship.
1.4 The Justice Landscape in Northern Uganda

The peace negotiation between the Ugandan government and the LRA that stalled in 2008 ended war-related violence. Besides the peace talks, several post war and justice initiatives were conducted to address the war’s impact. In this section, I discuss the justice landscape in which this dissertation is written. There have been formal legal trials with the ICC and the International Crimes Division (ICD) of Uganda’s High Court, Acholi traditional conflict resolution processes, and amnesty, among others. All these processes are ongoing but what do we know about women’s senses of justice and reparations following abduction and forced marriage, in post conflict northern Uganda?

1.4.1 Amnesty

After activism of civil society groups and organizations, politicians and others, the Ugandan Parliament passed a blanket amnesty law in November 1999 that was enacted in January 2000. The Amnesty Act was viewed as an act of forgiveness which resonates with Acholi traditional conflict resolution mechanisms that has forgiveness as one of its core principles (Ojok 2014). Section 3(2) of the Amnesty Act notes that a person who was involved in insurgency shall not be prosecuted or punished for those crimes (“The Amnesty Act” 2000) with the exception of the LRA leader and top commanders. Blanket amnesty had significant impact as many abducted children and LRA commanders returned home and accepted it (Anyeko and McClain 2012; Hovil, Quin, and Refugee Law Project 2005).

The majority of study participants received amnesty but complained that they never understood its meaning. After realizing that the certificate meant the government had pardoned them for fighting, formerly abducted women were upset and felt that government should have prevented their abduction. Therefore, the government cannot be the one forgiving them, instead government should have apologised for failure in its protection obligations and provided economic support. Economic empowerment is central to women’s senses of justice the study
reports on. Langec, a woman who spent eighteen years in rebel abduction as a forced wife and has been home for nearly twenty years since escaping abduction had this to say:

In every meeting where mothers gather, you will hear them say ‘we were not protected. That is why we are still suffering.’ That is why we still cry to them [government]. They never protected us. They also cry that we shot [fought] them. But fighting was not our interest. The government should have forgiven us, full and real forgiveness. That is why we don’t have any justice.\(^\text{14}\)

To Langec, the absence of the kinds of justice women want is due to government’s lack of forgiveness and acknowledgement of their victimhood. Acknowledging victimhood and failure to protect is discussed as a theme in relationship-based justice. Still, not all abducted persons who returned from captivity received amnesty because some of them went straight home or outrightly rejected amnesty on grounds that they did not commit any wrong (Acan 2017). The cultural institution of Acholi, religious and civil society groups embraced the Amnesty Act as it had shared values with traditional systems of justice mainly-reconciliation and forgiveness. I discuss traditional justice further in the last part of this section. The Paramount Chief of Acholi agreed with women’s perspectives on amnesty:

[Amnesty] is something good because for us we were thinking in our own [cultural] context ……So there is amnesty certificate, and when you come back [home] you are forgiven and we didn’t think of what these people were thinking of. We didn’t see them at all. For us, coming back home alive was good enough, and I think that twisted us a little bit and now what they [women] are raising is quite sensible that ‘I was taken, and you could not stop them from taking me and you are telling me that you are forgiving me.’\(^\text{15}\)

\[^{14}\text{Oral history interview, September 26th, Gulu Town.}\]
\[^{15}\text{Key informant interview, The Paramount Chief of Acholi-Rwot David Onen Acana, Oct 21st, 2019, Gulu Town.}\]
1.4.2 The International Criminal Court and the International Crimes Division of Uganda’s High Court

In February 2021, the ICC convicted Dominic Ongwen of sixty-one counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity including sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) crimes against seven women (Maliti 2021; The International Criminal Court 2021). In 2003, Uganda’s President referred the LRA case to the ICC, leading to an investigation and issuance of arrest warrants in 2005. However, the ICC intervention was viewed by civil society groups and community-based organizations (CBOs) as something that undermined the peace efforts, including amnesty (Apuuli 2008; Tiemessen 2014). Even if I value legal justice, given its incredible capacity to end impunity, I disagreed with its timing. As an Acholi from northern Uganda, I felt that my community had suffered enough, and just as I thought peace was about to return, the ICC showed up. Where were the international justice institutions all my life as I grew up in the war? The ICC was not fully welcomed by people who endured the war even if they longed for justice. The Acholi at the time, and up to now, want peace. I was part of several heated peace versus justice debates in Acholi between 2006 and 2010 as I worked as a researcher at national and international levels, and I wanted the peace agreement to be signed and to deal with justice questions later (See Apuuli 2011). I was tired of the war. Additionally, the impartiality of the ICC was questioned and critiqued by civil society groups in Northern Uganda for being one sided, since the Uganda People’s Defence Forces (UPDF) was not investigated. The Ugandan government reportedly claimed that the UPDF were to be tried nationally (Finnstrom 2010). Yet war-affected communities reportedly experienced abuses in the hands of the UPDF, not only the rebels (Amony 2015; Lucima 2002). The ICC’s sole focus on the LRA demonstrated powerfulness. It is victor’s justice, where the powerful wins as others lose.

Further, I quote a study that summarized people’s views on the ICC as follows; ‘it is biased; it will exacerbate the violence; it will endanger vulnerable groups-notably witnesses and children; it is spoiling the peace process by undermining amnesty and the ceasefire; and it ignores and

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16 I first worked as researcher with Gulu district NGO Forum from 2006-2009, and with the Justice and Reconciliation Project as Gender Justice Team Leader from 2010-2012.
disempowers local justice procedures’ (Allen 2006, 96). The LRA leader wanted the ICC arrest warrants to be lifted before he could sign the final peace agreement in 2008. With the recent conviction of Dominic Ongwen, the only LRA commander pending arrest and prosecution is the top leader (Maliti 2021). As prosecutions continue at the ICC, women who participated in this study demand for justice in the everyday, justice that is achievable outside of courtrooms.

Further, in early 2017, I was invited to speak on an international justice panel at Columbia University in New York. I was surprised when the entire room burst out laughing when I told them that the people in rural Acholi were upset to see Ongwen dressed in suits, in a developed country as they live in poverty. Even if the ICC can deliver justice, it is perceived as a distant kind of justice that sees itself as superior and undermines domestic justice processes (P. Clark 2018). But New Yorkers attending the talk bursting into laughter, indicates a lack of their understanding of, and undermining the lived experience and viewpoints of the war affected. Ongwen’s case remains controversial for so many reasons. He was abducted as a child, trained, and rose through the ranks in the LRA and became a top commander. He is viewed as a victim and perpetrator (Baines 2009). What is more controversial were things I learned during my fieldwork in 2019. For example, one of Ongwen’s former forced wives reportedly conceived another baby in her trip to the Hague. If this is true, there are so many unanswered questions: Was the conception of the new baby with Ongwen coerced? Has the woman fallen in love with Ongwen or is it Stockholm Syndrome? What are women’s senses of justice in instances like this? Ongwen’s charge sheet initially didn’t have SGBV, but it was amended after the Prosecutor’s visit to northern Uganda in 2015. I was part of the civil society groups that met with Fatou Bensouda, the ICC Prosecutor. A key message passed to the prosecutor was to listen to the women to understand their notions of justice. While portions of war-affected communities and Ugandan human rights organizations have voiced preference for legal justice, study participants were more concerned about justice that allows them to live lives in the everyday, an idea this study develops.

Besides the ICC, a special war crimes court was created in 2008 by the government to nationally prosecute LRA fighters not indicted by the ICC. This court was later renamed the International
Crimes’ Division of the High Court of Uganda (ICD). The ICD has been conducting trials of former LRA commander Thomas Kwoyelo with no verdict to date (Porter and Macdonald 2016). I learnt in conversations with friends in Gulu that Kwoyelo was still in prison by 2019 when I was gathering data for this study. In fact, I attempted to attend his hearing once in Gulu but was unsuccessful as court was not open to the public. Women in this study expressed disappointment at this trial that has lasted for ten years without any tangible outcome. As Kwoyelo remains in prison, his children are struggling to find land to live on and farm. I met his twenty-one-year-old son who had just been to the prison visiting his father and had come to see one of my participants who had survived forced marriage like his mother. I learnt in my conversation with her on July 19th, 2019, in Gulu, that Kwoyelo’s children and their mothers, who already remarried, want reparation.

The cases of both Thomas Kwoyelo and Dominic Ongwen remain contentious. The victim-perpetrator dichotomy, the existence of blanket amnesties and the lack of clarity on the extent to which the Acholi traditional justice system can sufficiently address the conflict are part of this contention. Still, the countless efforts made by civil society groups, political leaders, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), religious and cultural institutions, media, United Nations, war-affected communities, and others to end this conflict are commendable. For example, between 2007 and 2009, Gulu district had over 200 NGOs and humanitarian agencies working around the clock to support those affected by the war. Another important aspect of the justice landscape in Uganda is the Acholi systems of dispute resolutions that I elaborate next.

1.4.3 Justice and Conflict Resolution in Acholi

I started hearing and learning more about mato oput and traditional justice in 2006 when doing action research work with war-affected communities through Gulu District NGO Forum. While Acholi traditional mechanisms for resolving conflict is not the primary focus of my dissertation, I reflect on it as an alternative form of justice despite participants’ articulation of their senses of justice as lived. I also write as an Acholi woman who, besides living through the war, worked
closely with various stakeholders including the cultural institution of Ker Kwaro Acholi\textsuperscript{17} since 2006.

There are several Acholi traditional ceremonies used to address wrongdoing. These include \textit{nyono tong gweno} (stepping on an egg), \textit{moyo kom} (cleansing the body), and \textit{moyo cere} (cleansing the hills or area). \textit{Mato oput} (a reconciliation ceremony that directly translates as ‘drinking a bitter root called \textit{oput}),’ and \textit{gomo tong} (bending of spears) are symbolic ceremonies that occur after a process of negotiation, mediation and separation of conflicting parties facilitated by elders. \textit{Nyono tong gweno} has been used to cleanse dirt from formerly abducted persons in Acholi who had spent a long time in rebel captivity. Many participants may have experienced the ceremony although only a few mentioned it. \textit{Moyo kom} ritual restores wholeness through washing away of vengeful spirits. \textit{Moyo cere} has been performed to cleanse areas or \textit{cere} (hills) where people were killed. At one point, it was reported that people who returned from internally displaced persons (IDP) camps were having challenges cultivating their gardens as they encountered human remains such as bones or skulls on their land from unclaimed and unburied bodies from the war. \textit{Moyo cere} cleanses an area of spirits of people who could have been brutally murdered. These ceremonies have been documented in a report titled \textit{Roco Wat I Acholi}\textsuperscript{18} (Liu Institute for Global Issues and Gulu District NGO Forum 2005).

\textit{Mato oput} and \textit{gomo tong} are the most common rituals that have been proposed by the Acholi cultural leaders and civil society groups to offer traditional justice in Acholi.\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Mato oput} usually happens between two clans in the event of a murder and it is mediated by the elders. I witnessed several \textit{mato oput} ceremonies in Acholi and can attest that while the principles remain the same, the specific steps vary from clan to clan. The principles that underpin these traditional ceremonies are: truth about the wrong should be told; alleged wrong doer should acknowledge

\begin{footnotes}
\item[17] Ker Kwaro Acholi (KKA) is a cultural institution of the Acholi ethnic tribe in northern Uganda headed by a \textit{Lawirwodi} (Paramount Chief). The \textit{Lawirwodi} heads various chiefs (\textit{rwodi}) who represent various chiefdoms, clans, and councils of elders across Acholi sub region.
\item[18] Roco wat I Acholi translates as restoration of relationships in Acholi-Land.
\item[19] Acholi Religious Leaders’ Peace Initiatives (ARLPI) is among many civil society organizations like the Justice and Reconciliation Project that I worked for, are advocates for these mechanisms.
\end{footnotes}
their responsibility and apologise; compensation by the perpetrator’s clan to the clan of the deceased in terms of cattle or money; symbolic rituals like mato oput (drinking a combination of the bitter oput root, blood from the sheep and other herbs); and reconciliation and gomo tong ceremony that happens between the two clans/parties involved (Liu Institute for Global Issues and Gulu District NGO Forum 2005).

Study participants did not explicitly mention traditional justice as a sense of justice they want considering harm endured but referred to roles cultural and religious leaders can play in enabling their achievement of justice such as pressuring families to apportion land for women, acting as bridges between the women and their communities to end stigma and encourage unity and acceptance. Further, I have had views for and against traditional conflict resolution processes since 2006. My major criticism of the system was its positioning of women and women’s experiences. Between 2006-2010, I was in countless meetings where elders had a difficult time meaningfully responding to the question of how the issue of SGBV would be handled traditionally. Sometimes moyo kom was suggested as a ceremony for addressing sexual violence yet it would focus on cleansing the woman to heal her but the role and accountability of the perpetrator as in the case of mato oput remains unclear. In another workshop at the cultural institution, we were only two or three women in a room full of cultural leaders to debate traditional justice, reconciliation, and accountability. I ended up in the room because I was working for the organization that co-organised the meeting. Additionally, in the mato oput ceremonies that I attended, women performed less significant roles like brewing the alcohol or cooking food that would be eaten after the ritual was completed. In Acholi, female chiefs are uncommon, and women barely held decision making positions. This was one of the areas, that even as I write to date, I am unclear how a traditional process can sustainably address the justice needs of women and girls as participants did not reference mediation because it is undesirable for participants who decided to end relationships with LRA commanders upon returning home, arguing that they do not want anything to do with them. I am open to any innovations as culture is not static. For example WAN members have innovatively engaged cultural, grassroots leaders and communities in conflict resolution initiatives such as tracing the paternal roots of their children born in captivity (Baines and Oliveira 2020; Mutsonziwa, Anyeko, and Baines 2020).
But women’s participation and handling of harm should be elevated in these traditional ceremonies, instead of women like WAN having to figure this out on their own.

Further, Acholi cosmology is a means of restoring social relations (Clarke 2009). Clarke continues to note that the point of processes such as mato oput is not to punish but rather to restore social harmony within the affected community. Sometimes it is the little things that can address a big problem. In my culture, I often heard elders talk of poro lok (negotiating), riyo tal (mediating), laro lok onyo tek (stopping a fight or separating). All these are relationship-based forms of restoration and senses of justice, but none of them happen in a courtroom or court-like structure. These restorative senses of justice embedded in Acholi conflict resolution mechanisms are connected to relationship-based and place-based senses of justice articulated by participants even if their understanding of justice is different. Sometimes they are conducted under a tree in someone’s compound, a marketplace, a clan leader’s home, at the place where the incident happened or anywhere the concerned parties choose. The ceremonies involve dialogue and mediation. If a western justice process like the court evolves as seen with the creation of the ICC, why shouldn’t a traditional process of dealing with wrongs such as mato oput evolve to meet the current calls for justice? It doesn’t have to be called a court for it to be considered a justice process. It doesn’t have to be institutionalised even if processes are underway to institutionalise mato oput within the TJ framework in Uganda. Considering this justice landscape involving the ICC, ICD, Amnesty and Acholi conflict resolution mechanisms among others, it is my hope that the work of delivering justice both locally and internationally pays attention to the women’s senses of justice as they articulated in this study, a lived, holistic, and everyday justice. In the next section, I describe the layout of this dissertation.

1.5 Dissertation Layout

This dissertation has eight chapters. Each chapter focuses on a specific theme or key finding of the study with exception of Chapters Two and Three that provide background and methods information. The main themes that run across all these chapters are healing, compensation,
acknowledgement, harmonious peace, land, basic needs, and justice. The details of what each chapter focuses on are described below.

Chapter Two provides an historical background to ‘The conflict in northern Uganda’ and the impact on the general population. I weave here the stories of sexual violence and forced marriage inside the LRA as narrated by participants of the study. I write and reflect on my lived experiences of the war in this chapter because I realized that the war still lives in me in the stories, I describe in this dissertation despite the end of violence in 2008. I read literature on the conflict background but as I started writing, I found that the war and I were inseparable and determined that my story can contribute lived experiences as knowledge as well. The chapter concludes with a description of both violent and non-violent responses that were undertaken to end the war and address its consequences.

Chapter Three covers ‘Methodology’ that was primarily qualitative and informed by African approaches. I describe the two phases of the research that involved consultations with participants prior to proposal writing in January and six months of consecutive fieldwork in 2019. I describe the participants and recruitment procedures used. I also describe data collection methods, data analysis, writing, and planned results dissemination procedures. As an Acholi woman from Gulu district, I offer reflections on my positionality and how that impacted the research. The chapter also discusses ethical considerations taken during the study to ensure the research was respectfully conducted.

The Fourth Chapter is entitled “‘Love on top of mercy”: decision making after forced marriage and sexual violence.’ The chapter discusses factors that influence women’s decision making on whether or not to continue forced marriages with the fathers of their children born in rebel captivity. It is divided into two sections. Section one discusses factors that influenced women’s decision to end forced marriages with former rebel commanders. The second section presents women’s decisions to continue with former rebel commanders. Not much has been written about reasons why some of the women decide to go back to the men perceived as
violators of their rights while others do not. The study found that most women do not want anything to do with the men they were forced to be with in captivity.

Chapter Five, “‘Land that we call our own’: place-based justice’ argues that justice is place-based informed by women’s articulation that land is home, livelihood, identity, belonging, and healing. These articulations are shaped by customary marriage practices and wife inheritance \(^{20}\) in Acholi. Home is also defined as a place in which one’s ancestors flourish and one’s relations are strengthened. Yet this remains challenging because women are discriminated against within patriarchal systems exacerbated by the impacts of war that brought about their rejection, and land wrangles related to land inheritance and poverty. These customary practices around marriage and land informed how home came to be defined in terms of women and children’s identities and senses of belonging. Nearly every woman who participated in this study defined their senses of justice as ability to own land. Owning land means that the women will have a place to farm, build homes, belong and to live their daily lives.

Chapter Six is titled “‘Just pay us’: compensation-based and needs-based justice.’ In the women’s desire for a sense of justice that will enable them to live a decent life, they want to have ability to meet their daily human needs and to be compensated for the time wasted in abduction. This chapter discusses two senses of justice that include, needs-based and compensation-based forms of justice. Almost every participant mentioned compensation as their core sense of justice. The first part of this chapter argues that compensation offers recognition of suffering, time lost in rebel abduction and shattered dreams women had when they were little girls. Participants directed their calls for compensation to the government of Uganda arguing that it had a responsibility to prevent their abduction and suffering. The women spent anywhere between one and fifteen years in rebel captivity and feel their lives were stolen from them, a life they cannot fully get back but want it repaired through compensation. They stated that if they weren’t abducted, they would be some successful women that they dreamed of when they were young.

\(^{20}\) An Acholi traditional practice where once a man dies, his brother or clan member takes over the responsibility of caring for his wife and children that remains. But also, such a man could start an intimate relationship with his late brother’s wife. Two study participants have been inherited by their late forced husbands’ brothers.
Needs-based justice is discussed in the second part of Chapter Six. It argues that women’s desires to live dignified lives is at the core of their demand for enhanced abilities to meet everyday basic needs like housing, education for their children, and health. Besides wanting land (see Chapter Five), the need for permanent and durable housing constantly came up. The majority of mothers in this study want the government or other well-wishers to provide good quality education for their children lest, they start a new rebellion in the future. To other mothers, employment, and economic livelihood was all they wanted, not legal prosecutions as they felt that, when they have a job or a source of livelihood, they can meet all other needs of their family. Senses of justice as needs-based is a key element of the lived justice framework as it focuses on improving the everyday conditions of human life.

The title of Chapter Seven is, “‘As if you were already dead’: relationship-based justice.’” This chapter argues that justice is felt or lived in good relationship to and with others like family, friends, community, and government who still stigmatize and reject women in connection to the war. Women desire to feel loved and belong; recognition of their victimhood by the state and everyone in their vicinities would be a first step towards fulfilling this sense of justice. Women articulated that government should acknowledge its failure in the responsibility to protect them from being abducted and to recognise them and their children born in captivity as Ugandan citizens. Participants felt they had been forgotten by everyone and their return home was unexpected or unacceptable, that it was as if they were already dead. Some families had performed burial rituals upon hearing rumours that their abducted child had died in the bush. Since participants feel ignored and rejected, they envisioned a sense of justice where there is peaceful co-existence with everyone around them, love, and recognition among others. Many participants reunited with their forced husbands for their children to have a sense of belonging and a father, access land, and to avoid being seen as failures in life.

The dissertation ends with the eighth and concluding chapter that discusses final thoughts on the research, including a summary of findings that show how each sense of justice ties into the framework of lived justice, and contributes to the literature reviewed in this chapter. The chapter
also contains policy and program recommendations for incorporating women’s senses of justice and reparations into transitional justice policy, based on their suggestions. This is a way of giving back to the participants and keeping the research relationship ongoing through their advocacy efforts. Study limitations and areas of further research will also be discussed in this chapter.
Chapter 2: The Conflict in Northern Uganda

2.1 Introduction

Lweny piwa twon mony mupong libin
Kwa kony bot ladit ma loyo ngom
Leg wa Yesu olarwa oyot. 21

The sky was filled with nimbus clouds. It was too early to be that dark. As I walked back home from Gulu Public School one evening in 1995, I overheard rumours that the rebels were coming to town. When I arrived home, my mother told me and my siblings to hurry and leave before it starts raining. She had decided to remain home as we got ready to go and spend the night at Holy Rosary Church, seeking shelter from rebel attacks in the night. We insisted that mother come with us, as the rebels did not only abduct children, but also killed, tortured, or maimed adults. The quote above is an excerpt from a song we sung every evening before going to bed as my family and I prayed for God’s protection. Having found ourselves so vulnerable to war atrocities, the Almighty God was our only anchor of hope for waking up alive the following day. Indeed, God has protected us till today. But some days, we barely had time to sing this song and pray as we had to rush to town to find safe places to sleep. We left for the church immediately when mother decided to come with us. I remember there were days we left home unsure of where we were going to sleep, but just started walking anyway.

It started raining moments before we arrived at Holy Rosary. For whatever reasons, the church remained locked as people fleeing from the rebels crowded at the verandas of Holy Rosary Nursery School, right behind the church building. There was no space for us, yet we didn’t sing our prayer song above, and thought we had hurried enough to arrive early. When there was no rain, we slept in the compound as it was huge and all that we needed was a blanket and a mat. It was a gated compound, with a perimeter wall fence. So, it felt safe. It even felt safer because we were closest to church, and ultimately, to God. My blanket, clothes, and the belongings of my


to

21 Excerpt of a song from a Catholic hymn book. It translates as ‘pray for us for the war has filled everywhere, ask for help from the person who leads the land, pray to Jesus to save us quickly.’
family were soaking wet from the rain. I was freezing and could not find space to sleep as everyone squeezed their way into the verandas. In the days that followed, the nursery classrooms were opened to night commuters, but it felt like hell that night. Nonetheless, we stayed through the night, returned home in the morning before going to school and repeating that cycle, day in, day out. Thoughts of why this was happening to us lingered in my mind, but insecurity was part of our daily lives.

With this short story, I want to note that this is probably the hardest chapter of this dissertation to write because I am writing about a conflict I survived, a conflict I was born, raised and schooled in. I spent all my career working on this conflict and to date I continue to focus on it. It is so hard to draw a line between writing about the war as a graduate student in a Canadian university and seeing it as a story about my life. I write this northern Ugandan conflict history through my own lived experiences of the war with less citations because it is a legitimate story. These lived experiences are foundations to my career and ongoing research with the formerly abducted women, who are the primary focus of this dissertation. The researcher’s lived experiences are important especially in demonstrating how one’s positionality positively or negatively impact on the research, but also, allows the researcher to view things from an insider’s perspective and develop solid knowledge that would normally require a longitudinal study. In this chapter, I provide the historical background and contextual information about the conflict, the possible narratives about causes, Acholi’s lived experiences of the war, particularly in Gulu district where the research was conducted, while weaving in some personal experiences. I also discuss the conflict’s impact on the civilian population and initiatives that were put in place to end the war and address its impact before concluding.

22 Night commuters are persons seeking shelter from rebel attack. It is also known as alup in Acholi language and sometimes was used in stigmatizing tones because night commuters, largely children, were considered disrespectful, unruly, and badly behaved. But that was not always the case.
2.2 Historical Background of the Conflict

Since 1986, my home district of Gulu and the whole of northern Uganda was subjected to one of the most gruesome and longest civil wars on the African continent. This war was fought majorly between the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) rebels and the Uganda People’s Defence Forces (UPDF), formerly known as the National Resistance Army/Movement (NRA/M). The war also affected Teso, Lango, and West Nile sub regions of greater northern Uganda, but for the purpose of this dissertation, I only focus on Acholi sub region as it includes Gulu district, the location of my research. Before proceeding, it is important to look back at history and war narratives, some of which I personally experienced, saw, heard, or read about in the literature on northern Uganda. Uganda gained its independence from the British colonialists on October 9th, 1962 with the inauguration of Apollo Milton Obote as its first president, followed by coups and civil wars such as President Museveni’s takeover in 1986 (Amony 2015; Lamwaka 2016; Lucima 2002).23 But the historical background I provide here is from 1986, when the LRA war started because the women in this study were victims of the LRA.

2.2.1 Origins of the War

The NRA overthrew an Acholi president Tito Okello Lutwa, took over the Ugandan state on January 26th, 1986, and swore in its military leader Yoweri Museveni Kaguta as the president. Tito Okello had been president for only six months after gaining power through a coup as well. As someone born in the 1980s, I have known only one president all my life, because President Museveni has remained in power to date. Generals of Tito Okello’s army fled towards northern Uganda before or immediately after the coup, with some returning to their homes in the north, while others fled further to what is now South Sudan (Lamwaka 2016). The NRA troops reportedly arrived in Acholi around March or April of 1986, igniting a tense atmosphere in a relatively peaceful part of the country. According to Branch (2010), the NRA allegedly carried _______________________

23 Obote served as president twice (1966-1971, and 1980-1985). In 1971, Idi Amin overthrew Obote, but he was removed by UNLA, reinstating Obote’s presidency in 1980. Tito Okello took over power through a coup from the previous president Obote. Then, President Museveni ran a bush war from 1981-1986 overthrowing Tito Okello.
out violent counter insurgency campaigns even when there was no insurgency in northern Uganda at that time.

Research indicate that President Museveni’s forceful takeover of the state commenced war in northern Uganda (Finnstrom 2010). In August 1986, just a few months after the takeover, the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) led by an Acholi woman called Alice Auma Lakwena was born. This was a rebel movement that started in 1986 with the support of 150 soldiers who were part of the former government army, the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) and ended in 1989. Alice started the rebellion on grounds that her spirit, Lakwena (messenger) told her to recruit fighters. Alice’s HSM was the first violent response to the NRA attacks on civilians and marginalization of people in northern Uganda (Cakaj 2016; Lamwaka 2016). Alice waged a spiritual war using unconventional war tactics. As a little girl, I remember initially just hearing about Lakwena and wondered if it were true that Alice turned stones into bullets without expecting that war stories would soon define our lives and become our normal narrative as far back as I recall.

To the HSM, the war was a form of purification, healing, and peace. Alice Lakwena had a military backing and support from the members of the former UNLA who started their operations alongside the HSM. This group was called the Uganda Peoples Democratic Army (UPDA). UPDA later took over from Alice Lakwena after the NRA defeated her in Jinja in 1987. Alice went into exile until her demise in 2007 in neighbouring Kenya. The UPDA also operated alongside other splinter rebel groups such as Celil, until its end with a peace accord with the Ugandan government in June 1988. However, some of the UPDA’s commanders such as Odong Latek who were dissatisfied with the 1988 Peace Peace Accord joined Severino Lukoya’s Lord’s Army, and Joseph Kony. Lukoya is Alice’s father and Kony is Alice’s cousin. Lukoya created the Lord’s Army with some of Alice’s followers but was defeated in 1989 and spent some time in prison. For more details on this history, see (Amony 2015; Allen and Vlassenroot 2010; 24

24 Alice reportedly used moo yaa, shea nut butter and other herbs that would be smeared on her fighters as shields from attacks. Rumors had it that her fighters initially didn’t have guns as she transformed stones into bullets to fight enemies.
Alongside all these rebel groups, the Karamojong cattle rustlers often attacked the Acholi population, although they were most famously known for cattle raids. I learnt in a workshop organised by the Uganda Human Rights Commission in August 2019 that cattle raids happened between 1980s-2000s. The Karamojongs also raided my family’s cattle. I vividly remember seeing three of them with guns in our compound in my village in Paicho-Arut (seventeen kilometres out of Gulu town). Thank God, it was almost 7:00 pm EAT and it was quite dark inside our hut so they couldn’t see us, as I can’t imagine what they could have done to us. My two sisters and I were very scared as we waited for my mum to come so that we start walking to town because the insecurity was worsening. The three Karamojong fighters stood in our compound for a while as gruelling gunshots went on, but they didn’t see any sign of human beings or cattle given another group had long before taken our cattle. Seeing guns in their hands made my heart pump so fast. They spoke a language we didn’t understand as my sisters, and I remained silent. Then they left. We were later picked up by our aunt to join my mum who had gone to get something at their house. Thousands of Acholi people lost their lives and cattle due to the Karamojong raids that happened alongside the LRA conflict. My mum’s claim for cattle compensation hasn’t yielded anything to date.

Besides the Karamojong fighters, and following Lakwena and Lukoya’s defeat, Joseph Kony who first worked as a spiritual leader with Lakwena’s HSM emerged as the new spiritual and military leader, marking the beginning of the LRA rebellion (Amony 2015). Kony was joined by Odong Latek and other members of the former UPDA, Celil and UNLA. Latek oversaw the military command of the rebels, while Kony was the spiritual head. Latek would soon be killed in a battle with the NRA, leaving Kony as the only rebel leader fighting against the NRA. Kony’s troops wielded violence in northern Uganda, targeting civilians from 1987-2006 and

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25 A house made with mud bricks and beautifully grass-thatched roofs. A combination of huts makes a typical Acholi homestead.
continued in neighbouring countries following a stalled peace negotiation in Juba that I will elaborate later.

2.3 Causes of the Conflict

There have been various explanations of the roots of this conflict. An outstanding one is its spiritual element. As I mentioned earlier that as a child, I could not understand how stones could transform into bullets or even how moo yaa (shea butter) could act as shields to HSM and LRA fighters, and I still don’t, to date. When Kony showed up, he claimed to be possessed by lakwena and juma oris spirits. Lakwena was the same spirit that his cousin sister Alice had before her defeat. Another incomprehensible aspect of this war are the stories that I heard from the abducted children. For example, that Kony used the Ten Commandments, Christian and Arabic teachings in the Bible and Quran to run the rebel group. Like Alice, Kony claimed that the Acholi people needed to be purified by violence-hence targeting civilians. He basically saw his war as an act of cleansing corrupted Acholi NRA collaborators yet the NRA had reportedly abandoned the population to rebel violence, allowing its continuity as collective punishment by proxy (Branch 2010). To the rebel leader and his followers, God too had a hand in this war that probably explains why the Bible became a key document in helping him maintain his army. In my work with people who were abducted by the LRA, and some participants in this research, I came to learn how they believed in the spirits as part of Acholi worldview, often referring to the spiritual powers directing the LRA. For example, I quote a woman who spent fifteen years with the LRA below:

This war Ketty, I don’t want to lie to you, it was God’s war. Because there is no one person who will plan to start a war on their own. For example, if you say in your current happy mood that, “go, pick up guns together with three other people and we go to the bush.” Will you go and find happiness there? No, you won’t. You will realize that it was God’s plan…….I recall there was a time, they [government] had recruited militias in every village. That was the same time lakwena had also become tough. They [LRA] said that if you are shot anywhere, destroy everything in that village and leave no living thing that breathes.26

26 Oral history interview, September 26th, 2019, Gulu Town.
No wonder, “kill every living thing,” was the rebel’s command we encountered as we documented the Barlonyo Massacre in Lango sub region (Justice and Reconciliation Project and Liu Institute for Global Issues 2009). The above quote shows that while the LRA operated on spiritual directives, sometimes, attacks were acts of revenge on civilians that were thought to support the government, or abandoned the rebellion (Justice and Reconciliation Project 2008).

But as a Christian, I believe God does not harm his creation. Instead, he protects them, the way he protected me. By the LRA having lakwena spirits, the Christian Bible and the Islamic Quran simultaneously is as confusing as the various explanations for the roots of this war. As noted, the Ugandan Government attributed the horror of harm and peculiar spirituality of the LRA to what was perceived of as a ‘backward’ group of people (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010), a ‘barbaric and insane cult with no discernible political agenda’ (Allen 2006, 25). Yet according to Kristof Titeca (2010, 71), ‘the spiritual order serves clear strategies and rational advantages; it guarantees internal cohesion of the rebel group through legitimizing the struggle and motivating and disciplining its combatants, and intimidating the outside world.’ It makes sense to me now, more than before, reasons why my identity as an Acholi automatically subjected me to stigma in high school in South and Central Uganda. At my school, Acholi people were seen as primitive, backward and rebels. As a teenager, I didn’t understand the spiritual roots of the war and the stigma I endured was part of a national narrative. As reported, ‘young students especially were tired of hearing the Acholi as a “primitive warrior tribe”’ (Finnstrom 2008, 238). But this spiritual root of the war that led us to be seen as a primitive group is not the only cause of the war.

Militarised and ethnic political power struggles offer another explanation for the roots of the war in northern Uganda (Okuku 2002). The political power struggle in Uganda has its roots in colonial histories of the British indirect rule and creation of the north-south divide. The country still struggles to date to unite these regional divisions that were created during colonization with an unclear national reconciliation agenda on our tables. Colonization alone is reported as the root of many conflicts that followed independence (Refugee Law Project 2014). Since the former president was an Acholi, all his tribemates were by default, enemies of government at
that time of the *coup*.\(^{27}\) According to Adam Branch (2010), the ethnic perception of the NRA prevented it from separating Acholi people and ex-UNLA fighters. The NRA had a counter insurgency approach on arriving in northern Uganda, triggering the formation of several rebel groups that at the end of the day left unimaginable pain and suffering on the Acholi, Lango, Teso, and West Nile sub regions that I will elaborate in a moment. But political and ethnic power struggle always meant, the group that is not in leadership gets marginalised or excluded from sharing the national cake. Marginalisation of northerners including the Acholi contributed to this conflict.

The Acholi people were not only kept in the margins of politics, but also placed in the margins of the world’s gaze by our own government that often minimized the threat of the war and saw it as an Acholi problem. For example, in the 1990s, the worst kinds of violence were happening in northern Uganda, but the world didn’t know. As a child, we often awoke to the news of our neighbours, relatives and friends being killed, mutilated, or abducted and I wondered why the war was being fought, and why it couldn’t be stopped. As I write this, I remember my friend, Emma Acayo whose life was blown away by landmines that hit their vehicle along Gulu-Kitgum highway in 1994.

### 2.4 Characteristics of the Conflict

Massacres, displacement, abductions, sexual violence, torture, and mutilations among others, characterised the war in northern Uganda. I discuss these in detail below.

#### 2.4.1 Massacres

During my work with the Justice and Reconciliation Project and Gulu District NGO Forum, I was part of a team of researchers that documented various human rights violations that occurred in the region. For example, my colleagues and I spent time in Atiak, Corner Kilak, Mucwini,

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\(^{27}\) For example, Lamwaka (2016) describes how Acholi people living in Uganda’s capital were tortured, killed, and pursued following NRA’s takeover in 1986.
Abia and Barlonyo internally displaced persons’ (IDP) camps to gather witness accounts of the massacres and other kinds of violence that happened in their locations. Over 300 people were killed in Barlonyo in 2004 by the LRA (Justice and Reconciliation Project and Liu Institute for Global Issues 2009), and 250 in Atiak by the same group in 1995 (Liu Institute for Global Issues and Gulu District NGO Forum 2007). Several sites of massacres include Lukodi, Amyel and Palabek. For example, over 400 people were killed in Palabek. Killing was one aspect of the war, and the region continues to mourn the loss of loved ones to date. The wounds have hardly healed because many children were left orphaned, women and men were widowed, and clans were left without elderly heads. The LRA’s tactic was attacking civilians to show the government their military might that had often been rated low, but also, some massacres like Mucwini was a retaliation after an abducted person escaped and returned home with their guns (Justice and Reconciliation Project 2008). Other killings and torture like Burcoro are reportedly carried out by the government’s national army (Justice and Reconciliation Project 2013).

Figure 2: A community member shows me a massacre site in Acolpii
(Photo by JRP)
2.4.2 Displacement

At one point, over ninety percent of the Acholi population were in IDP camps. As reported 1.5 million people were internally displaced by early 2003 (Dolan 2011; Allen and Vlassenroot 2010). The IDP camps lasted from 1996-2008. This was the largest IDP population in the world by 2003 and in Tim Allen’s words, ‘people in IDP camps lived in a place of extraordinary structural violence (Allen 2006, 60).’ The Acholi community traditionally had homesteads in sparse areas referred to as ‘cere’ (hills). Agriculture was the main economic activity of the Acholi and being displaced to the IDP camps meant not only loss of homes, but also livelihoods. Suddenly, there was no land to farm or even animals to rear given the Karamojongs had long before raided most of the cattle. My family was displaced from Gulu to Jinja in 1996 because my elder sister had a job in Jinja by then. Although we weren’t probably counted as IDPs given our move to Jinja and many others who crossed Karuma Falls into other southern and central districts, most of the Acholi population experienced displacement in one way or another. Cere wa (our home), our identity was not only shaken by the war, but broken. I returned to Gulu in 2001 to work with several relief agencies such as Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and World Food Programme (WFP) as a volunteer, distributing food and non-food items to the displaced persons in camps. After graduating from Makerere university, I returned to work for non-governmental organizations till I came to study at the University of British Columbia in 2016.

Nearly half of my work life in northern Uganda was in IDP camps. I saw with my own eyes the conditions of my people. There were days we took food while escorted by armoured vehicles to IDP camps that had been burnt down by the rebels the previous day or so, or we heard reports from camp leaders that the rebels arrived the same day after we left and took away all the food we had just delivered to the IDP camps. NRC and WFP had to plan to take food to the same camps again, or people would die of hunger. Seeing my people living in tents and starving often broke my heart. The scenes remain in my mind to date. There were hardly any toilets (or latrines) or even places to stay. We spent nights in school classrooms that had no window shutters or doors, or at health centres, as there were hardly any paid accommodations. Indeed, Acholi people lived in a subhuman condition in the IDP camps.
While it was popularly said by Acholi that the camps made it easier for the LRA to target them, the experience of living in the camp itself was a war within a war. Men and women were drunk by the day’s dawn, or even for days due to frustrations as they barely had anything to do. Our cultural practices such as *nyom* (traditional marriage), dance, songs and *ododo* (folk stories told around a bonfire) were in the periphery during displacement. Women experienced sexual violence in their struggles to fend for food, water, and firewood around the camps. Accessing medical treatment was nearly impossible for some as malaria, ebola, malnutrition, cholera and HIV-AIDS claimed many lives during displacement and the war generally. Displacement was forceful and some have called the IDP Camps rural prisons (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010). Chris Dolan (2011) described the internal displacement in northern Uganda as a form of social torture, while Sverker Finnstrom (2008, 239) referred to it as something that had become ‘a chronic emergency’ given people had been herded in camps like cattle in a kraal. This chronic emergency was illustrated by the endless efforts of humanitarian agencies that almost acted as bystanders of the conflict. A rumour circulated during this time that the food distributed to IDPs by the WFP was indirect support to the rebels. But then, the situation would have been worse if no food was distributed to the camps, whether the rebels raided them or not. In fact, WFP used armed escorts to take food to the camps, something against their operation policies.

Figure 3: An IDP Camp in N. Uganda
(Photo by JRP)
2.4.3 Abductions

Another war characteristic that caught the world’s attention was abduction by the rebels. It is reported that more than 66,000 children and adults were abducted by the LRA (Pham, Phuong; Vinck, Patrick; Stover 2007). Incidences of abductions happened largely around boarding schools, villages and in the IDP camps. Children as young as eight years were ripped from the care of their families and taken by the rebels. Abducted children were kept as captives for several years in the LRA, trained to fight, manipulated, and made to believe that there was nothing left at home as their relatives had all been killed by the government soldiers. One key strategy the LRA used to keep abductees with them, was threatening to kill them and their relatives should they escape, among other approaches like spiritual and political mediums of control. Sometimes the abducted children were sent to commit atrocities on their own communities so that they were seen as perpetrators, deterring them from wanting to escape and return home. For example, in Mucwini, one of the massacre sites mentioned earlier, the rebels killed in retaliation of an abductee who had escaped and returned home (Justice and Reconciliation Project 2008). Many abducted children remain missing to date while several of them were reportedly killed in battles, died in the bush, or killed by the LRA when they were caught escaping.

In the late 80s, my family and I literally spent most nights in the bushes around my village to avoid abductions. Even if it felt safe for a little bit as we moved to Gulu town, it wasn’t long when even that home became so insecure to the point that my siblings and I commuted to spend nights in shop verandas, hospitals, or churches to feel some sense of safety as I earlier narrated at the start of this chapter. I ‘night commuted’ till I went to high school at Sacred Heart in Gulu in 1996 where I survived abduction on countless occasions when the rebels attacked our school. The experience of leaving our house in Arut to stay the nights in the nearby bushes as a little rural girl, and that of a night commuter in, and around Gulu town, served the same purpose-to avoid abduction or being killed. The nights in the bushes were much scarier given we weren’t only afraid of the rebels, but also dangerous wild animals like snakes. It was hard to fall asleep as fear was more powerful than sleep, let alone days when it rains, and all our clothing and blankets were soaked by rain. As a teenage urban night commuter, it was so stressful to leave our home.
every evening to spend nights in town, return home in the morning, get ready and go to school, and back home before repeating that cycle. From 2006, I participated every year in Gulu Walk, a famous initiative started in 2005 in Toronto by two Canadians Adrian Bradbury and Kieran Hayward to raise awareness on the plight of ‘night commuters’ and the war in northern Uganda. As I walked every year in my orange T-shirt, I often felt that I was not only walking to raise awareness as an NGO staff, but I was replaying the actual walks I was part of. Other years, I was mentally disconnected from the walk even if I was physically there. While in other walks, I felt good that finally something was being done to raise awareness of our plight. In 2003, some night commuter centres had been constructed but even if the children didn’t have to sleep on shop verandas or in the bushes anymore, there was need for national and international awareness on children’s plight and to stop the war. Still, abductions and “night commuting” were not the only characteristics of the war.

2.4.4 Torture and Mutilations

As the story is often told, everyone in northern Uganda experienced the war in some way. Torture, beatings, sexual violence, and mutilations were not uncommon. I interacted with so many women and girls who were sexually abused by both fighting parties during my work in the region. Some of the participants in my current research reported that their mothers were raped, and their fathers were killed before the rebels would later abduct and take them to be their wives. My own uncle Abeny had his lips cut as he was riding a bicycle in Gulu. The rebels hated people who rode bicycles as they were thought to be collaborators with government soldiers. But mutilating was also a strategy to control the population. Similarly, I remember that I couldn’t bear the sight of seven women in the mid 1990s near Gulu main market whose breasts, lips and ears were mutilated by the rebels, put in plastic bags, and sent to show everyone the rebels’ brutality and control. The commission of many of these atrocities have been reportedly blamed on both government soldiers and the rebels (Lamwaka 2016; Justice and Reconciliation Project 2013). At some point, the saying that ‘when the elephants fight, the grass suffers’ was real in northern Uganda. Civilians were caught in the middle of accusation and crossfires among fighting parties. One would be blamed for collaborating with the rebels if found in the villages
by the government soldiers, and vice versa if found by the rebels. Next, I present war experiences of women who participated in this study.

2.5 ‘Tearing A New Plastic Bag’: Stories of Sexual Violence Inside the LRA

They took all the girls that they had distributed and started the distribution all over again. I was taken to the home of a man called Opira. While there, later in the evening, I heard him talking about ye cu kavera manyen (tearing a new plastic bag). I had heard about that already and he said he was going to open his already-made brand new plastic bag.28

As Laloyo stated, ‘tearing a new plastic bag’ was used by LRA commanders as a metaphor for breaking the virginity of little girls. The commanders were always excited and often chatted over dinner regarding how they would be having sex with virgins. These talks were heard by participants when they served meals to their commanders. Many ting ting(s) (young girls who hadn’t reached puberty), did not understand this at first. But Laloyo had already heard this before and knew what the commanders were talking about.

2.5.1 Given As a Wife

Once the LRA abducted girls, they took them to the operation room department, together with other goods that had been looted. In some situations, girls were gathered in one place and commanders were invited to choose the ones they wanted to have as wives, while sometimes the girls would just be assigned a particular home to go to even if they had never heard of the person before. It was because of distribution of girls like goods against their will that made many end up with very old men who already had senior wives. These senior wives were often cruel to young girls. It is also because of this nature of distribution that some men, especially middle level commanders, found themselves being given wives even if they did not want. Studies indicate that both males and females in the LRA were forced into marriage and viewed themselves as victims.

28 Wang oo, Gulu town, October 11th, 2019
of the high command (Aijazi and Baines 2017). Aleng, who was given to a man when she was only eight years old describes her experience:

They said they should give the girls to the soldiers. There were older, middle aged and younger girls. They went and gathered us together in big numbers. Then many men came. They were told to each pick a girl of their choice. Even when we did not like the men, we never had a choice. The man I was with came and pointed at me, and then I was heartbroken. I felt so bad that an ugly man had picked me to be his wife. I was very young and did not know anything to do with being with a man.29

Once given to a commander, it was up to them to decide how to treat the girls. Very few participants reported getting good treatment from commanders. All the commanders cared for, were their sexual greed and excitement of how they would be breaking the virginity of little girls. Besides being a wife, young girls were expected to play many roles like fighting, childbearing, bodyguards, spies, and porters among others. For example: ‘she might have been a fighter herself and she has been a wife…her body was used as a battlefield, and she has not recovered.30

Although the majority of participants were just given as wives, some girls and women had opportunities to court with their next husbands if the previous one died in a battle. But that choice of courtship was not readily available. Many participants reported being forcefully given to men even if they had just lost the previous man. For example, Lakalatwe tells us:

I was abducted by the LRA on 18th January 1996. It was my birthday. I was taken to the bush and after three days I was given to a man as a wife. I stayed with that man for only four months, and he was shot dead during a battle. I was again given to another man. I produced one child with that man and the child is still alive. The second man also died in a battle. I was again given to a third man, with whom I produced my second child while still in captivity. I returned from captivity with these two children. When I returned home, I went back to live with the third man I was given to.31

29 Oral history interview, Gulu town, September 10th, 2019
30 Interview with the Director of Gulu Women’s Economic Development and Globalization, Gulu, October 7th, 2019.
2.5.2 Between Rape (Or Life) and Death In the LRA

They told me to choose between death and being Opio’s wife. I kept quiet….. They again told me to refuse if I wanted to die or get up and go to Opio’s home to stay there as his wife. He came later in the evening and talked to the mothers where I was and then he took me with him. I cried the whole night. I cried for almost a week, and they would force me to go and sleep in his house because I did not want to. I stayed that whole year till we went to Congo when I was still young. They say when a young girl is “slept with,” she does not conceive. I did not conceive after all that happened to me. I took so long to see my period and my breasts had not grown. He slept with me forcefully and it could hurt so much. I used to cry a lot. He did not care that I was a very young girl. There were older girls for him to pick but he refused and wanted me.32

The LRA sexually violated all the women in this study and forced them to be their wives when they were young girls. Two participants, Aleng (quoted above) and Laloyo were only eight years old when they were given as wives. The LRA used these girls as sexual partners throughout their abduction. The women however never used the word rape itself to describe their experiences. They used phrases like ‘he forced me to have sex with him,’ ‘he slept with me,’ ‘he lived with me like husband and wife’ and others. People in the global West would refer to whatever happened to them as rape, although, rape was only one aspect among many harms endured. From my understanding, it is the first few sexual encounters the women had with these commanders that they describe as a forceful sexual experience or rape, the rest of the time spent there were something that became “normal” to the point that a few women fell in love with the men.

Even if most women had one partner for a long period of time or throughout their abduction, women like Lakalatwe had to change partners several times when the men they were given to died. Some women were raped before even arriving at the operation room or LRA base where the girls would be distributed. The LRA had a sexual code of conduct governing sexual behaviour but acts like raping ting tings or other abducted girls continued to happen when the LRA men were on stand-by (military missions). Something that the study learned was that there

were no gang rapes as each commander had many wives and lived in a marriage-like relationship. This finding is similar to what Monika Satya Kalra (2001) found before.

2.5.3 *Ting Tings*

Little girls called *ting tings* were assigned to stay at senior commanders’ homes to provide labour and baby sit. But ninety percent of the *ting tings* ended up as wives of the man whose children they baby sat. Some *ting tings* had to go through various rapes before eventually being claimed by one man. *Ting ting* was a name the commanders used to refer to little girls at their homes. In fact, the nickname was often personalised as an addition to a senior commander’s name. For example, ‘Okello’s *ting ting*’ would be used to refer to that little girl who is a wife, a babysitter, a porter and so on at commander Okello’s home. Participants noted that it was much riskier when a girl was not assigned to any home as the commanders forced them into sex any time. Yet a woman without a man had a hard time getting food, clothing, and other living supplies that women often received through their husbands. I quote Lapit who became a *ting ting* at eleven years:

> He tried to sleep with me, and he found that I was too young for him and not his size. He put me to stay with the boys at the *adaki* (defence tunnel)…..He told me to remove my blouse and put up my hands and I did. I didn’t understand what he was doing but he was checking if I had hair under my armpits. He then told me to pull up my skirt and I did. He was checking if I had pubic hair…..He asked me if I was seeing my O.P [menstruation period] and I told him that I had not. Then he told me to go back to where he called me from.³³

From Lapit’s experience, forced nudity and invasion of her private parts alone were traumatizing. Yet, despite the trauma with the first man, she was given to a second man. She continues to narrate her ordeal:

> I was given to a commander called Odong. Things were not easy for me with this man. When I was taken to his home, in the evening he called me to his room and wanted to

³³ *Wang oo, Gulu town, October 11th, 2019.*
have sex with me. While in his room he told me that I was taken to his home to be his wife. As a child who reasoned like a child, I told him that I could not be his wife because I was too young. I told him that he was the age of my father, so I could not be his wife. He got angry and told me that he was going to shoot me. I stood up and told him to shoot me. If you saw how I was by then, I would not be his wife. That was in 1995. With my ignorance and young age, that man slept with me. I cried a lot. In the morning, he called his first wife and said to her, “take this stupid girl and give her water to take a bath. I don’t want her to come close to where I am. She should not cross my doorstep. If she comes close to my doorstep, I will shoot her.” He added that he did not want to see my face.34

Rape of ting ting was not unusual in the LRA. Despite what Odong did to Lapit, he later that evening ordered soldiers to beat her for an hour, likely as a cover up for his guilt and exercise of power. Unable to walk due to the beating, Lapit was carried and taken to another commander’s home and later recovered at a sick bay (a place where pregnant and nursing mothers, and the injured lived). At only eleven years, Lapit had to be taken back to the operation room under the care of an administrator until she courted a third man with whom she had two children before returning home. Lapit’s husband remained in the bush, and she said she would reunite with him if he were to return because she has his children and felt that he loved her.

Girls were also forced to strip naked for senior wives of commanders to check if they were well shaven or clean enough to go and have sex with commanders. Senior wives prepared young girls for commanders. In instances like Lapit’s, commanders forced the girls to strip naked so that they could see if they had pubic hair and were fit for sex. The inhumanity of the LRA commanders to even think that having pubic hair or starting menstruation meant ability to have sex is unbelievably painful. In other cases, young girls were forced to watch their senior commanders have sex with senior women, one after another. This was mental torture for the little girls who never knew anything to do with sex. Larem describes her experience of this below:

The man had four wives. I was given to him temporarily to take care of me because the soldiers were fighting for me. He would sleep with his wives in front of us in the same room as we all watched. He did so many shameful things in front of us. His wives said

34 Wang oo, Gulu town, October 11th, 2019.
that was his character ever since they became his wives. There were many houses but there was only one bedroom that he wanted everyone to sleep in.  

### 2.5.4 Forced Motherhood and Labour in the LRA

Apart from two women, most participants were forced to become mothers when they were very young. Besides being mothers, the women still had to continue their wifely duties by ensuring that they sleep with the men whenever he called for them. They had to cook, farm and labour for the men and everyone in their households. While some women were forced to fight on top of all these roles, Laber had a contrary view in describing the various roles she played. She says, ‘you find that you have saucepans on your head, your child on your back, and whatever you have. You are literally walking with your entire home. What kind of fighting can you do? How would you fight? They should stop those names. It is not okay with us. Women were not fighters.’

The LRA subjected young girls and women to harsh labour regardless of whether she was pregnant or not. For example, Lakalatwe tells us:

> When I was pregnant, I was very weak, and I would fall sick often. One day when I was from the garden, my husband started telling me so many things that he wanted me to do. He wanted me to grind a basin of sorghum, five cups of lamola (grain), cook very quickly because he wanted to take me to another defence to fill the granary with sorghum. I told him that I could not handle all those tasks he had given me. He started saying I was a witch and that I killed my late husband so I wanted to kill him too….That day I felt angry and cried a lot.

Furthermore, young girls like Aleng never knew what it was like to be pregnant or even to give birth. At only fourteen years old, Aleng lost her baby at birth. She narrates:

> I gave birth from Congo. From Sudan, I could sleep all the time and walking was very difficult for me. I was always staying behind and wherever we reached, I could sleep a lot and if I was not woken up, I would remain behind for good. I did not know that I was pregnant. I saw my stomach growing bigger and bigger and when we reached Congo, labour pain started. I could not eat for a week. Maybe it was hunger that killed my child. I

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35 Oral history interview, Gulu town, September 10th, 2019  
36 Oral history interview, Gulu town, September 11th, 2019  
37 Oral history interview, Gulu town, September 11th, 2019
gave birth and they said the baby took long to come out during delivery. The baby came out but was not breathing well. It died that night.³⁸

Aleng returned from captivity with one child but currently has four children fathered by her forced husband. Aleng continued this relationship after returning home for reasons I discuss in Chapter Four. The experience of sexual violence inside the LRA that I briefly described above is not comprehensive but is intended to highlight what participants went through. This background provides a basis upon which women made decisions to end or continue forced marriages, and what their senses of justice and reparations are considering these experiences.

However, women and girls who were not abducted by the rebels were victims of repeated sexual violence in displacement camps. Girls dropped out of school at very tender ages and became mothers—often referred to as “child mothers.” On top of the risk of being sexually abused as they fended for food, water, and firewood, women in the IDP camps were constantly victims of domestic and gender-based violence (Okello and Hovil 2007). Acholi culture is patrilineal and places men in positions of authority, but their masculinity is tested by their ability to provide, protect, and lead the family, with or without war. Having lost this sense of control and ability that came with the provider and protector role, many men resorted to alcoholism that exacerbated unleashing of violence such as beatings to their wives (see Okello and Hovil 2007). Within the larger LRA war, there was a second war going on in the IDP camps seen in the subhuman condition people lived in. But for women, there was an inner layer of a third war in the camps—domestic and gendered violence. The women had nowhere to run once confronted with an abusive husband. No number of words can fully describe what I saw or experienced as I worked with IDPs and generally war affected communities in northern Uganda, but what I described here is merely a glimpse of people’s lived experiences of the conflict that left them with untold consequences.

2.6 Consequences of the Conflict

Where can I even start? Poverty? Stigma? Trauma? The conflict brought all these negative consequences and much more in the lives of the Acholi people, and all war-affected persons. One can say peace has returned to Gulu and northern Uganda generally, but the mere absence of gunshots does not equate to peace. The Acholi people continue to suffer various consequences of this over two-decade’s war. This is not to understate the importance of the fragile peace my community currently enjoys. In fact, I even can’t describe how I felt when for the first time in my life, the end of violence seemed very close after the signing of the cessation of hostilities agreement in 2006 between the Uganda government and the LRA rebels. It would be an injustice for me to not mention what the experience of the war left in our lives.

2.6.1 Poverty and Unemployment

With property destruction, animal raids and looting, and people’s inability to continue agricultural economic activities, poverty was a direct impact felt in every household in Acholi during and after displacement. At the height of the war, most of the Acholi population lived on one meal a day worth approximately one dollar, and the situation is still the same today, for many. Additionally, as many educational structures such as schools and higher institutions of learning were destroyed or displaced during the war, many children in the region could not continue learning due to worries about insecurity to the point that poor performance in schools was the norm. Gulu District hardly had a mention when it came to best performing districts in Uganda. The war stole our chances to get good quality education. For example, I didn’t go to kindergarten because of the war. With the existence of universal primary education, the issue was less about school fees, but mostly about the lack of safe learning environments and the poor quality of education that resulted. How could a child learn well after spending the previous night in the bush, on a shop veranda or a night commuter center? Fifteen years after the guns went silent in northern Uganda, schools still struggle to improve their quality of education, and the impact of an inability to access good quality education or being deprived is still eminent. It is linked to unemployment. I quote one woman who asked for compensation as her kind of justice.
She argued that the women would be having better jobs if only they weren’t abducted or deprived education.

For it to be said that justice has been served, the government should cool the women’s hearts. If you look carefully, we were abducted when we were very… very young. If you weren’t abducted, you would have studied, and been able to stand on your own feet without going to look for any help from anyone. So, we returned with children whom government is not doing anything for. Government is not doing anything for us too. Government should pay us. Compensation is very important.\(^3^9\)

The high unemployment rates and calls for compensation tie into women’s emphasis on needs-based sense of justice that I will discuss later. When a group of people are deprived good quality education, they are also deprived employment, and automatically relegated to poverty.

### 2.6.2 Land Conflicts

Land wrangles in Acholi has its roots in the war. Having spent twelve years in IDP camps with no or limited access to ancestral land, people lost boundaries partly because boundary markers such as big trees had been cut. Land ownership is communal in Acholi where land is owned by clans that include a combination of several extended families. Most elders who clearly knew clan and family land boundaries lost their lives in the war. Once people were told to leave the camps and return home in 2008, a new kind of conflict emerged: land conflict. Formerly abducted children, including participants in this study, were kicked out of their family’s land by their clan relatives. For example:

I should have stayed in the bush for the rest of my life. I went to the barracks to join the UPDF [government army] but Obali [former LRA commander] refused to accept me. He said I was going back to the army because of anger and bitterness, and that I had not been in good condition so if I was recruited, I would go and harm people at our home. I had made up my mind that if they recruited me, then I was going to escape from the barracks one day, go and shoot all those people at our home, so that the land can remain there. God made me feel at ease, and as I speak, I do not stay home. I tell people I come from Palaro for the sake of it, as I do not go there, and nothing takes me there.\(^4^0\)

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\(^3^9\) Focus group discussion, Gulu Town, October 31\(^{st}\), 2019.
\(^4^0\) *Wang oo*, Gulu Town, October 11\(^{th}\), 2019.
The war left ownership of most ancestral and communally owned land in the hands of a young generation. For example, my cousin brother summoned my widowed mother and elder brother to the High Court in Gulu over trespassing on our own ancestral land that my family was returning to when the violence stopped. Luckily, the judge learnt that we were close relatives and asked us to resolve the issue out of court, and it was resolved amicably. This example shows how brothers have turned against brothers, and sisters have turned against sisters because of land conflicts. My elder sister who worked as a state prosecutor in Gulu once told me that majority of cases in the Gulu regional court were related to land (see Hopwood 2017; 2015). This is a long-term consequence of the war that will impact Acholi for generations to come.

2.6.3 Children Born of War

Another impact were children born during the war. These are “children of children” abducted by the LRA, and child mothers from the IDP camps. Children born of war - including those born in rebel captivity - is a challenge for the Acholi community. Many of them are rejected by their maternal relatives yet their paternity often remains unknown, given that they were born because of sexual violence by a stranger during displacement or by commanders who kept their identity a secret within the LRA. These categories of children are the last to access land amidst the rising land conflict in Acholi. Yet land ownership is patrilineal. Some children missed formational years in their education and have had a hard time staying in school. Many managed to resume and excel in education, but a group fell out due to their parent’s inability to pay school fees, provide scholastic materials, lack of food or shelter, and social stigma among others (Baines and Oliveira 2020; Stewart 2021). The participants in this study, who are mothers of these children, face various challenges in raising them as single mothers because many are unaware of the clans of the children as their fathers died, remained in the bush, or concealed clan details to the women. The men who returned home neglected their roles in raising these children except for women who reunited with them (Denov et al. 2019; Stewart 2021). I quote below a former wife of Kony, the LRA chief:
All the war related wrong in this region is blamed on the children. *Bal alaka tyer I wii lotinoni* (the children have inherited blame for wrong). Acholi people do not want the children. Even the few relatives of *Ladit* [Kony] in that clan do not want the children. Their clan is the two of us and God who is standing for them. Sometimes I find it quite different and a little hard for our children. Even if we all have similar problems, you find that at least the other kids have their clans. My sister, thank God that you didn’t stay at Kony’s home. If you did, your problems are even bigger now.41

### 2.6.4 Social Stigma and Rejection

Social stigma is an impact of the war that formerly abducted persons face. The experience of stigma has led to broken community and family relationships among the Acholi who highly value peaceful co-existence within the community. The abducted and their children are blamed for the war by a community against which they were forced to commit atrocities. They are rejected after they escaped LRA captivity and returned home because of the stigma they bring to their families and a cultural presumption that they are possessed by vengeful spirits of the dead called *cen* in Acholi. Given these children are forced to kill or walk on dangerous areas like forests, rivers and mountains, the community believes that they have *cen* and can harm others unless they are cleansed through traditional Acholi rituals that I discussed in Chapter One. This view has entrenched stigma and rejection towards participants, their children, and abducted persons. See for example (Baines 2007; Denov and Lakor 2019; Stewart 2021).

### 2.6.5 The Missing

On September 14th, 2019, I heard my uncle Mr Marcelino Okullo lament on the pain of losing both his first- and last-born sons as we mourned the loss of my cousin brother Onek at our village in Paicho. His last-born son, Okello Ocii, was abducted by the LRA and his fate remains unknown to date. It is already a loss of a life to my uncle as I could tell from his lament. My friend Carol Adokorach posts every year on Facebook about her missing abducted sister Monica as a way of remembering her on the date she was abducted. The missing, dead, or alive, remains

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41 Initial workshop, Gulu Town, August 20th, 2019. *Bal alaka* is an inherited sin or blame for wrong.
one of the most painful impact of the war. Many women have been widowed and thousands of children were orphaned because of the conflict. With thousands abducted as earlier mentioned, the fate of many remains unknown including my cousin brother Okello Ocii and my friend’s sister Monica. Parents of the missing, like my uncle and others, still long to hear the fates of their children. When the peace negotiations started in Juba in 2006, parents often asked those who were going to participate in the talks to find out from the LRA delegates if their children were still alive or not. The pain of not knowing is an endless grief many Acholi people still go through to date. But also, the memories of the massacred still lives on and are felt on the daily lives of the people in Acholi who have unanswered questions as to why their loved ones were murdered or disappeared.

2.6.6 Health Impairment

The health situation of the Acholi people has also deteriorated because of the war. Many lives were lost to diseases like ebola, cholera and poor living conditions in the camps, or starvation. Thousands of people were infected by HIV-AIDS during and after the war. In fact, Gulu is the second largest district in Uganda with the highest number of people living with HIV/AIDS now. The stigma associated to AIDS has gone down as being infected with it became the new normal. I constantly heard members of women groups or market vendors joke and speak very casually about being on anti-retroviral drugs for AIDS. One of my friends who used to work for The AIDS’ Support Organization (TASO) in Gulu told me how some of the health centres at sub county levels had a room full of file records for the infected. Some of the participants in this study only contracted HIV after escaping and returning home. The LRA had strict rules surrounding sex and reproduction that curbed the spread of the disease among its fighters (Baines 2014). They reportedly released people who were HIV positive.

2.6.7 Trauma

‘Everyone in Acholi is traumatised’ is a phrase I often heard in northern Uganda. This statement should not be taken lightly because whether you were abducted or not, lived in the IDP camp,
survived an ambush, a massacre or land mines, worked as a social worker, researcher, expert, and any kind of service provider, it is probably the level and severity of the trauma that is different. To many, denial of trauma and claims of being okay makes us not count ourselves as traumatised. I would lie if I said I am not part of the trauma because I literally belong to all these categories of people in Acholi. I was drawn to do my bachelor’s degree in community psychology because the name of the program alone made me feel I could help my community. Still, the trauma remains a problem associated with the war that we are dealing with. To be honest, even as a traditional Acholi Christian middle-class woman, I sometimes struggle to draw the line between the experience of trauma and the concept of *cen*-vengeful spirits of the dead. They both seem to have similar characteristics with various kinds of ‘treatment.’ For example, one would have to go through psychotherapy or formal regular counselling or even drugs to treat trauma or depression in the Western concept. In our Acholi traditional concept, one who experiences nightmares, depression, restlessness, mental problems, epilepsy, and others are likely seen as possessed by *cen*, hence needing traditional ways of therapy such as cleansing rituals and appeasement of spirits. And lastly, for some of us who are Christians and believers in God’s power to heal would probably embark on prayer rituals or ceremonies to address our various states of trauma. Eventually all these three beliefs aim at the same thing—restoring one’s mental wellbeing and a sense of normalcy after experiencing trauma.

### 2.6.8 Weakening of Acholi Culture

The beautiful Acholi culture has weakened over time because of the war. Our traditional leaders nearly lost grip of the people as they were displaced, tortured, or beaten together with the very people they lead. Acholi youth who largely grew up in IDP camps hardly understood and appreciated the cultural institution of Ker Kwaro Acholi (KKA) and its roles. During the war, we no longer had riddles, *wang oos* and *ododo* (folk stories) around the bonfire. Cultural ceremonies were almost extinct as everyone scrambled for survival. It was hard to have our *lakubukukbu* marriage dance or even *guru lyel* - a last funeral rite event to celebrate lost lives, as such ceremonies were too risky. I am proud that the main cultural aspects of the Acholi people that survived were our very beautiful traditional dances like *larakaraka, bwola, ajere, dingi dingi,*
apiti, otole, and lacucuku, and our tasty foods like dek ngo, lakotokoto, olel, boo, malakwang, kwon kal and others (See also Opiyo 2013). In fact, Acholi songs and dance became the most significant means of coping, telling war stories and enabling healing during and after the war. I recall how my colleagues and I at the Justice and Reconciliation Project organised cultural competitions of songs, dance, and drama, with youth groups in the IDP camps. It was beautiful and one of my most favourite activities at that time because I love dancing, and it was good to see renewed hope in my people who danced away happily even in the face of a cruel war. We worked closely with Ker Kwaro Acholi in many activities to address the consequences of the war-including research, documentation and organising peace negotiation workshops. But each one of us still has work to do in revitalizing our shaken culture beyond food, song and dance that survived the war.

2.7 Efforts to End the Conflict

Even when initially, it felt like the world had turned its gaze away from the suffering of the Acholi people, certain efforts were put in place to end the conflict. The violence ended in northern Uganda, but the rebels remain at large in South Sudan, Central African Republic (CAR), and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Even if the war was ongoing, both violent and non-violent initiatives were taken to address it. These ranged from grassroots initiatives like storytelling, community dialogues, roundtable discussions and mato oput (a reconciliation ritual), to national processes like amnesties, peace negotiations, military operations, and formal legal trials, to international level initiatives such as the viral sensational Kony 2012 video, listing of the LRA as a terrorist group by the United States of America, the International Criminal Court (ICC) and more. I discussed these in Chapter One but I elaborate on peace talks and military responses to the conflict in this section.
2.7.1 Peace Talks

Figure 4: Religious leaders with LRA members during Juba Peace Talks of 2006-2008 (Photo by Michael Otim)

Another commendable effort to end the conflict in northern Uganda was peace negotiation between the fighting parties. Besides the Pece Peace Accord between the government and Uganda Peoples’ Democratic Army in 1988, many peace negotiations were conducted to end the war, but I will only highlight a few. In 1994, Betty Bigombe who was the Minister of State for the Pacification of the North, championed the first peace negotiation with the LRA. She was able to obtain a ceasefire agreement with the rebels but this whole process was reportedly ruined by the President of Uganda who gave an ultimatum of seven days to the rebels in February or March 1994 (Lamwaka 2016; Okuku 2002). As a peace studies graduate, I learnt that ultimatums do not work during a peace talk given every party at the negotiation table needs to feel the power balance. By the President issuing an ultimatum, it immediately put him, and the government’s peace delegates, at a higher power position at the table that likely stalled the negotiation. Instead of the LRA following the ultimatum, they resumed hostilities. Three days after the announcement was made, it is believed that the LRA went to South Sudan, where they established bases and often launched attacks in Uganda and retreated to their base. I recall hearing stories that the LRA fighters and their leaders moved and interacted freely with civilians
at trading centres as there was hope that with the ceasefire agreement, peace was about to return to northern Uganda. This progress was reported by radio stations and newspapers. It was the talk of Gulu town that peace was about to return. Mego Betty Bigome Atuku, as the Acholi often called her, was hailed for making that progress. It was disappointing to my community to learn a few days later, that hostilities had resumed.

Ten years after the failure of the peace talks in 1994, Mego Betty Bigombe again engaged with the LRA between 2004 and 2005. Given a failure of an initial attempt, the LRA reportedly remained suspicious and cautiously met the peace delegates. It was also about the same time that the ICC issued warrants of arrest to the rebel leader Joseph Kony and four of his top commanders for war crimes and crimes against humanity. This reportedly made the situation worse, and the talks stalled. Since the President made the referral to the ICC, who in turn issued warrants of arrest at a time when a peaceful attempt was ongoing, just as his seven-days’ ultimatum in 1994, one wonders if the government had the political will to end the war peacefully. It is ironic that it is the same government that supports the work of Mego Bigombe that did things that jeopardized the process rather than making it successful.

The hope for a peaceful settlement of this war was not completely lost as negotiations again started in 2006 at Juba, the capital of South Sudan. This talk was possible with the offer of South Sudan’s Vice President-Riek Machar to serve as a mediator. Juba peace talks lasted for two years, a period the negotiators worked through five major agenda items and signed agreements that included: 1) cessation of hostilities; 42) comprehensive solutions to the conflict; 3) accountability and reconciliation; 4) disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR); and, 5) the final peace agreement. The parties signed a cessation of hostilities agreement on the 26th, August 2006 that marked the beginning of a peace atmosphere in northern Uganda. Several agreements for each of the agenda items were signed by the negotiating parties except the final

agreement that is still unsigned to date. The Juba talks stalled in November 2008 when the LRA leader did not sign the final peace agreement. Reports indicate that the LRA leader wanted the ICC arrest warrants to be dropped, money, and a position in government (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010). I was working for Gulu District NGO Forum, an umbrella NGO that supported the Acholi cultural institution of Ker Kwaro Acholi (KKA), a key player at the negotiation. I personally heard some of these arguments that the LRA delegates put forward before their leader could sign the agreement in a meeting that my colleagues and I at the Justice and Reconciliation Project, and KKA jointly conducted at Fairway Hotel in Kampala in May 2008 to address the concerns of the rebel leader. Representatives including religious, traditional and government leaders went to meet Kony in November 2008 after the workshop so that he could sign the agreement, but Kony did not show up. The government’s army resumed military attacks in December 2008 as the LRA moved to other countries like Central African Republic.

The government of Uganda however continued to implement other aspects of the agreements that were signed through its creation of the International Crimes Division of the High Court, and a National Transitional Justice (TJ) working group among others. My friend Margaret has been the champion of this TJ working group, working tirelessly as its TJ Technical Advisor. Progress was made over the years as the TJ policy, the first of its kind in the African continent was approved by the Ugandan Parliament on June 18th, 2019, the date I arrived in Uganda for phase two of this research. The policy had however, sat in ten drafts for years. Its approval provides a justice framework that gives hope for Ugandans in need of justice and various forms of redress. But also, it is my hope that the results of this study, particularly women’s senses of justice as a lived concept, as will be later discussed, shall be considered in the move forward in operationalizing this policy and other aspects of the Juba peace agreements.

2.7.2 Military Operations

Aside from the several efforts to end the war peacefully, I briefly touch on military operations that the government carried out. Our government often had preference for a military approach to end this conflict. Between 1987 and 1991, Operation North was conducted in northern Uganda.
The operation reportedly aimed at alienating non-combatants because its effect was directly felt when LRA maimed and killed civilians in retaliation as government’s National Resistance Army (NRA) seemed reluctant to protect (Allen 2006; Lamwaka 2016). For example, Evelyn Amony (2015) wrote in her memoir how she survived NRA attacks in Atiak in places like markets during these operations. The forms of violence discussed above like killing, torture, mutilation and abductions were sometimes conducted by the LRA after an unsuccessful government military operation. LRA attacks were used to show the government’s inability to protect the people but sometimes atrocities were committed to revenge on a community believed to have a military unit and considered supporters of the government. Any conflict response effort that makes civilians more vulnerable to losing their lives and property can be considered unsuccessful because government’s role is to protect, not the contrary.

After the first attempt to negotiate peace with the LRA in 1994 as discussed above, two military operations named Operation Iron Fists One and Two (2001-2002) were launched. The LRA bases in South Sudan were attacked and this operation pushed the rebels back to Uganda who in retaliation, unleashed horrific violence on the population. I recall at this time that I worked as a volunteer for Norwegian Refugee Council where I witnessed or survived some of these retaliatory forms of violence by the rebels. For example, I witnessed a car that had been ambushed by the rebels, passengers were reportedly abducted to carry the goods, and the rebels set the vehicle ablaze in 2002. Another incident was an attack by the rebels on Patiko Ajulu IDP camp before we were even done distributing food. Our convoy had to leave for town with some of the food in the trucks as there was no time to offload them. Sounds of bombshells and guns rocked the neighbourhood, with people running to various directions—in fact, to nowhere, but their insecure grass-thatched huts, as we had the privilege to drive back to Gulu town, leaving undistributed food on the school compound. Other times, we arrived in the camps a day after rebels burnt down everything and people were starving. By the time this operation was happening, it was not new that once government launched a military operation, the rebels retaliated on civilians.
Another big military operation was launched on December 14th, 2008. It was called Operation Lightening Thunder. It was launched approximately two weeks after the LRA leader didn’t turn up to sign the final peace agreement. It was a collaborative effort among the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and the UPDF with support from the United States of America (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010). This operation was considered a final blow to the Juba peace talks that had made so much progress over the two years’ period. The operation also pushed the LRA further into Central African Republic where they reportedly continue operating to date.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter focused at providing background information to the area where the research took place so that readers are aware of the context in which women’s senses of justice and reparations are situated. I have presented the history, causes, characteristics, and consequences of the war as lived experiences of my community. Notably, 66,000 people were abducted by the rebels, hundreds were massacred, and ninety percent of the northern Ugandan population were internally displaced for twelve years before returning home. Civilians were subjected to sexual and gender-based violence by warriors. Consequently, trauma, poverty, land conflicts, reduced literacy rates, increased vulnerability to diseases like AIDS, children born of war, and stigma among others became the norm. Both violent and non-violent initiatives were taken to address the war, including military operations such as Operation Iron Fists and peace negotiations like the Juba Peace Talks. Various grassroots, national and international processes are ongoing to address the conflict including dialogues and legal trials. The Justice Law and Order Sector (JLOS) has championed the development of transitional justice initiatives in Uganda seen by the 2019 approval of the national TJ policy by Parliament. However, amidst all these, no reparations have been provided, and the legal case before the International Crimes Division of Uganda’s High Court has not been concluded, even after fifteen years of “peace.” To date, the people of northern Uganda, including participants in this study, continue to wait for redress. A few children still escape and return home intermittently from rebel captivity. The LRA are continuing atrocities in neighbouring countries as northern Uganda remains largely peaceful.
As an Acholi who was born and raised in the war zone, I wrote this conflict history while drawing on personal lived experiences and our experiences as the Acholi sub region as well. This is important as it gave me opportunities to reflect and tell stories about the war from my perspective that comprise knowledge construction. Lived experience involves how people live through and respond to those experiences (Boylorn 2008). In this chapter, I described how participants, Acholi people, and I lived through the war and my responses to the experiences as they ground this research. I end this chapter with Sverker Finnstrom’s (2008, 241) words. He writes ‘violence and war are socially and politically patterned rather than being mere cultural essences or something biologically innate.’ The Acholi are not innately warriors or entirely primitive. We love peace.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This dissertation answers the following research questions: Why do mothers decide to reunite or not with the fathers to their children born of forced marriage and sexual violence? How do women make these decisions? What is the prevailing sense of justice and reparation sought by women who had children from forced marriage? It addresses these questions by centering the lived experience of women in the study as knowledge. Women’s lived experiences of war informs how they frame senses of justice. But also, as an Acholi female researcher who was born, raised, worked, and lived through the war as discussed in the previous chapter, my lived experiences and past knowledge working with women informed my analysis and writing. With lived experiences being the heartbeat of this research, a qualitative methodology that draws on native African ways of knowing, preserving, and passing information was used. For example, the study adopted some features of community-based participatory action research such as participant consultations, inclusivity, and sought to understand the everyday experiences of participants (Watters, Comeau, and Restal 2010). The Acholi people of northern Uganda practice an oral traditional way of preserving and passing knowledge from one generation to another, often through boko lok (storytelling) around wang oo (a bonfire). Therefore, oral history interviews, storytelling and focus group discussions are methods that resonate with Acholi tradition, key in documenting women’s lived experiences of war and senses of justice.

Figure 5: Ketty conducts a community dialogue in Anaka IDP Camp in 2006 (Photo by Erin Baines)
Since 2001, I have worked in the Acholi sub region of northern Uganda with conflict affected persons like women, men, girls and boys in relief, research, documentation, gender, peacebuilding, and justice programs. I first worked as a volunteer distributing food and non-food items to displaced persons for Norwegian Refugee Council and World Food Program from 2001-2002 and continued through my undergraduate study breaks until I graduated in 2006. From 2006-2016, I worked as a researcher and gender expert with Gulu District NGO Forum, the Justice and Reconciliation Project and Fund for War-affected Children and Youth in northern Uganda (Uganda Fund). With nearly twenty years of work experience in this research location, flying from Vancouver to Uganda in June 2019 with my two daughters did not feel like fieldwork because we were returning home. This fieldwork lasted for seven months in Gulu district of northern Uganda. However, the research formation, implementation and writing is grounded in not only this seven-months’ period, but nearly twenty years of work and a lifetime of personal lived experiences. For example, this research benefited from deep contextual knowledge of the research location, relationships established during past work with many study participants who are the members of Women’s Advocacy Network (WAN). I am grateful to the WAN that was instrumental in supporting this research including participant recruitment and office space for my research assistant. Rwot Lakica women’s group that I referred to at the start of Chapter One is part of the WAN. I used life mapping and storytelling processes before with groups like Rwot Lakica and I found these relevant to generate women’s senses of justice because storytelling allows thick narration of experiences (Merriam and Tisdell 2016), builds trust, and relates to cultural ways of knowing, remembering and communicating.

Overall, the research engaged with sixty-eight participants including fifty-nine women who were abducted and forced to be wives of rebel commanders and nine religious, traditional, government and non-governmental leaders, and civil society representatives. I did nine in-depth oral history interviews, four focus group discussions, two wang oo (storytelling circles), two consultative meetings, and one workshop with women who survived forced marriage and sexual violence in rebel captivity. This fieldwork happened over two phases and two trips to Uganda that I expand in the next section. In this chapter, I describe the methodology, research formulation and phases
including how consultations took place with participants prior to proposal writing. I also describe the category of participants and how they were recruited. The chapter explains data collection methods, data analysis, researcher positionality, and results dissemination activities. I conclude with ethical considerations taken during the study.

![Image of Women's Advocacy Network match](c01-025.jpg)

**Figure 6: The Women’s Advocacy Network match on International Women’s Day in Gulu**

*(Photo by JRP)*

### 3.2 The Research Process

In 2015, I sat in a meeting room in Gulu, filled with various stakeholders’ representatives, to speak with the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court on the case of the LRA rebel leaders—particularly, Dominic Ongwen. As discussions went on about the case like amending Ongwen’s charge sheet to include sexual and gender-based violence, it prompted me to think that many of us in the room lacked a clear understanding of what justice looks like for women who were abducted from their homes at tender ages and forced to become wives, fighters, porters and mothers of rebel commanders’ children. I started thinking of a project that would allow me work

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46 Ongwen was convicted in February 2021 for commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity.
with these women to learn their justice needs, interests and priorities. To add, as a transitional justice and gender expert at Uganda Fund, a grant making entity, I was overseeing the implementation of a three-year grant that I couldn’t substantially change, given the program had already been designed and funded. As I participated in meetings of all sizes in Uganda and internationally, with nearly ten years’ work experience with the women, I started thinking of designing an in-depth research study that could lead to an understanding of women’s senses of justice and reparations. I applied to the doctoral programme at UBC and moved to Canada in 2016 to undertake this study, rooted in and formulated from a very practice-oriented background of years of work in northern Uganda. This research happened in two phases.

3.2.1 Phase One: Consultations

At the end of my parental leave, I traveled to Uganda in December 2018 and spent the first two weeks of January 2019 meeting with sixteen women in Gulu district to gather their thoughts on my research ideas. I knew most of these women from my past work at the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP). As I worked with women who survived forced marriage and sexual violence in Northern Uganda, I supported the formation of the Women’s Advocacy Network (WAN) in 2011 as part of JRP’s gender justice initiatives. Since then, I have maintained relationships with WAN. WAN’s chairperson, Evelyn Amony, mobilized the participants for these consultative meetings which took place in their offices in Gulu town. These consultative meetings were important to get insights for my research formulation, but also, it was so good to be back home to reconnect and speak to women after a couple of years. I met with the women individually, in casual conversations, but I also held consultative meetings with two separate groups. One group comprised of women who escaped rebel captivity, returned home with children born of forced marriage, and were continuing with the fathers of their children, formerly LRA commanders. The second group was comprised of women who decided to end the relationships they had in captivity, even when some of the men had returned home. I purposefully asked Evelyn to mobilize these two groups of women to discuss my research topic with them. Feedback from these meetings informed my research proposal development that was approved by my doctoral committee on May 10th, 2019.
During this trip, I also discussed with the Chairperson of WAN and Director of Watyer Ki Gen (WKG) opportunities for collaboration in organizing a dissemination workshop that would generate recommendations for actions by policy makers and inform advocacy efforts of these two organizations. WKG is an organization started by women who survived the war to advocate for the reintegration and recovery needs of their children born of war (CBOW), while WAN focuses on justice, reparations, and reconciliation for both the women and their children. Women already wanted to start sharing their views on the topic at this phase of consultation as they felt the topic was important to highlight their voices to civil society, government, and policy makers at all levels. It seemed to me that women not only valued my focus on their senses of justice and reparations, but also recommended the need to include men in the research as they were also suffering and had been ignored by service providers in Uganda. Women who had continued the forced marriages felt the study was good as finally people like friends, family and communities, government, local leaders, and others will learn why they decided to go back to the men who are primarily seen as perpetrators. Those who did not reunite felt the study was important to highlight challenges they face upon leaving the rebel group, and what their senses of justice and reparations are. Women appreciated the study’s focus on their current lives as most times, researchers have focused on their life in abduction yet some of them exited the rebel group ten to twenty years ago, and they would rather focus on life now than the painful past that they are recovering from.

This trip and consultation were also crucial because it made women feel that their input was valuable for the research process and commenced a relationship building journey with participants that I met for the first time. When I returned to work with them in June 2019, as I will talk about in the next phase, the women were excited to be part of the research and often referred to our January meetings-saying that I kept my word-that I would return to work with them. To add, even if these early consultations with some participants built relationships that enhanced the research, there were still challenges that I expound on in reflections on positionality.
3.2.2 Phase Two: Data Collection

I spent June to December 2019 in Gulu district gathering data for this research. This phase continued the process that was started in Phase One through consultative meetings. The first activity conducted was an initial workshop that I explain later in the data collection methods. Oral history interviews, key informant interviews, storytelling circles, and focus group discussions took place in this phase. I worked with research assistants who helped in this phase specifically with transcribing and translating recorded data and, in a few instances, accompanied me to the field for group activities. I started transcribing part of the recorded data myself while still in the field during this phase.

3.3 Research Location

This research was conducted in Gulu district, Acholi sub region of northern Uganda. I worked with women in Gulu municipality, Awach and Palaro Sub Counties. These areas are among the most affected by the war between the Ugandan government and LRA rebels. Before coming to UBC, I worked in Gulu as already stated, which means, I understand the nature and impact of LRA activities on the Acholi people. Without the prevailing peace that was ushered in by the 2006-2008 Juba peace process, this research would not have been possible. As discussed in Chapters One and Two, and demonstrated by the literature reviewed, both local and international justice processes are ongoing as part of the mechanisms to redress the war’s consequences. Local and international organizations continue to provide education scholarships for children, awareness creation on gender violence and human rights, health and sanitation, HIV/AIDS, agricultural livelihoods, and reintegration among others, for war survivors to recover, although funding is scarce.

Every time I went to Gulu, I noticed something different. Worth mentioning are the tarmac roads that elevated development in the city. It always felt good to see such exuberant glamour in my town. But behind these roads and buildings, lie the impoverished, depressed, and stigmatized population, including study participants. It sometimes felt like there was a new war ongoing
because of a category of children and youth named-Aguu that terrorize the town. Whether or not the Aguu incidences and origins are related to street children or the war, remains a subject of research, but it is a security threat for Gulu. It never impacted the research directly as all activities were conducted at daytime, but my participants and I live in a society that is dealing with various kinds of insecurities post-LRA war. I purposefully chose this region as it is my home and I felt that I owed my people a contribution to knowledge on efforts to redress the war’s impact. But sometimes I regretted this choice as the academy is designed to question and regulate research-related activities in ways that make researchers like me who do fieldwork at home feel lost. I sometimes felt that I would have done better if my research focus was not at home. It was confusing to me to discuss privilege as though I am a global northern researcher going for fieldwork in the south while balancing this with my lived experiences and pain as a survivor of a war I am researching about.

Further, I knew of many women groups and networks in Gulu that made this research possible. Since being part of the team that researched the topic of ‘young mothers, marriage and reintegration’ (Liu Institute for Global Issues and Gulu District NGO forum 2006), most of my work focused on women like study participants to date. As mentioned, right from conducting storytelling projects with Rwot Lakica, the WAN was formed in 2011. The storytelling project was particularly important as it expanded from one group (Rwot Lakica) to over fifteen groups across greater northern Uganda. Relationships that started under a mango tree when I worked as a research collaborator with my PhD supervisor, Dr. Baines, meeting Rwot Lakica women’s group every Saturday afternoon for two years was significant in my research. My consequent work in storytelling and gender justice advocacy through JRP allowed me build trust, and networks with participants and local leaders in the region. The women refer to me as lamin wa (our sister), and the local leaders such as the Paramount Chief and the Archbishop refer to me as latin wa (our child) or latin Acholi (child of Acholi). These deep relationships of trust allowed participants to entrust me with their stories as I was not a stranger. I was home.

47 Aguu is a term used for youth and children who spend most time on the streets and are reportedly committing harm such as robberies, murders, beatings, and others.
3.4 Research Participants

I applied a criterion-based sampling strategy (Merriam and Tisdell 2016; Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte 1999) to recruit fifty-nine women in both rural (31 participants) and urban areas (28 participants) who were abducted as young girls and turned into forced wives and mothers of rebel commanders’ children. Some of these women had participated in the January 2019 consultative meetings and August 2019 initial workshops in Gulu town. All participants are part of pre-existing WAN groups. The first category included women who reunited with the fathers of their children born in rebel captivity, after escaping and returning home. The second category involved women who did not continue forced marriages upon returning home. This category also comprised of women whose forced “husbands” returned home under the blanket amnesty or remained in the bush - alive or dead - and a few who were inherited as wives by brothers of their

Figure 7: WAN members after a storytelling session
(Photo by Author)
“former husbands.”\footnote{In Acholi culture, once a woman’s husband dies, his brother takes over caring for her and her children or become her husband through a practice called wife inheritance. But also, the Acholi people generally view every member of the community as relatives even if they are not related by blood.} A woman could volunteer to participate in the study if she was eighteen years and older, and fell into the above-mentioned categories. Participants were abducted between the ages of eight to sixteen years\footnote{Except for one participant who doesn’t remember her age at abduction.} and spent three to fifteen years in rebel captivity before escaping and returning home. In captivity, they were forced to perform roles such as wives, mothers, fighters, porters, babysitters, and intelligence officers. Except for one participant who didn’t give birth, the rest returned with one to four children born in captivity. Most continued giving birth after returning home with some currently having up to eight children. Participants spent ten to twenty-two years since escaping abduction and returning home but have not found justice or reparations.

At the time of this research, most participants were twenty-seven to sixty-two years of age with some unsure of their ages as their parents couldn’t recall their dates of birth as their birth certificates were destroyed during the war. The youngest participant was abducted at only eight years old in 2000 and returned in 2009. The oldest participant worked as a herbalist and birth attendant for mothers in the LRA for fifteen years. Most participants were forced wives to rebel commanders and bore their children. The abduction experience had significant consequences like trauma, social stigma, and ruined future dreams among others on young girls (now women). Even if their cries for reparations seem to fall on deaf ears, they are optimistic that something will change, hence their willingness to voice their views in this research.

Recruiting participants was possible with the support of the WAN, the organization that supported me in this research. I wrote letters of initial contact (LOIC) as part of the recruitment procedures and shared them with women in group meetings. I had also met with the women in Phase One (consultations) and discussed the research with them. It was in Phase Two (data collection), when the WAN and I asked the women to self-select to participate in focus group discussions and 
\textit{wang oo} during my initial visits to their routine village savings and loan
associations (VSLAs) group meetings. It was in these group visits that participants were asked to volunteer and inform their group representatives of their interest to participate. Following these group meetings, conversations were conducted on the phone with the support of Evelyn Amony, my research assistants Moses Komakech and Sharon Awor, and myself to get names and contacts of women who were interested in participating. Once women agreed to participate, they were invited to an initial workshop, although not all participants were part of this workshop due to financial constraints. I later identified a few women for in-depth oral history interviews. Self-selection ensured they were not coerced to participate.

Furthermore, recruitment of key informants depended on my pre-existing relationship as I knew most of them before coming to UBC. I made courtesy visits to their offices, explained the research, and asked for their consent to participate. I conducted recruitment of some of these key informants by phone calls or emails. Key informants included two religious leaders, two government leaders, one traditional leader and four non-profit and survivor organizations representatives. These participants were chosen due to their long supportive working relationship with women. For example, WAN and Watyer Ki Gen work with women who participated in the study and the archbishop accompanied WAN to Uganda’s Parliament in 2014 for a petition for reparations. Overall, sixty-eight participants of eighteen years of age and above were involved in this research. See Appendix A for details on the participants.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

I used five methods to gather data from participants. These were individual oral history interviews, focus group discussions, storytelling circles, also known as traditional Acholi wango, workshops and field notes. For example, I conducted one initial workshop in Gulu town on August 23rd, 2019, for one full day. The workshop aimed at explaining the purpose of the research to participants, planned research activities, discuss, and address their expectations and

50 Sharon left early in the research, the reason I refer to only one research assistant.
51 In 2014, WAN was supported by civil society organizations like JRP, ARLPI, Refugee Law Project and others to present a petition to Uganda’s Parliament for reparations.
fears in engaging in the research and develop a joint plan on how to implement the study. Seventeen participants from both rural and urban areas took part in this workshop. Discussions included current life situations of women, opportunities, and challenges faced and what their hopes were, for the future. Each member drew a life map that helped me understand them more before going deeper in the research. It is a drawing of life stories on paper, indicating significant events like birth, abduction, and family life using symbols and narrating stories about them to one another (Baines 2016, 21). I used this method while working on a collaborative project between Dr. Baines of the University of British Columbia and JRP with similar women in northern Uganda. Papers, markers, crayons, and pens were given to two groups of women to draw their lives since leaving rebel captivity using symbols and objects that they wanted to tell stories about. These included significant past events that happened in her life that changed her current life for better or worse, and what her aspirations are for the future. After drawing, I split the women into two groups and had them tell stories about what they had drawn in their life maps. Sample photos of these maps are found in figures one, two and three below. From my past work with women like the WAN members, life mapping exercises were significant in igniting memories and narrating stories about these lived experiences in coherent ways. For example, a woman could draw a hut and narrate such incredible stories of what that hut represents.

Figure 8: A woman’s life map
The second method used involved two kinds of interviews - oral history interviews and individual key informant interviews. I conducted in-depth oral history interviews with nine women who have returned home and decided to either remain single or sought new marriages, and those who reunited with fathers of their children. These oral history interviews aimed at examining the survivors’ senses of justice and reparation, circumstances that influence their decision to reunite or not, and why. Each interview lasted anywhere from thirty minutes to one and a half hours at the woman’s home, community centers or WAN office. The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions that allowed room for narration of in-depth stories. Most times, the direction of interviews depended on stories being told. Questions asked to each woman were not similar except a few primary questions on their decisions to reunite or not, and their senses of justice and reparations. Key informant interviews were done to get opinions based on their connections with participants. Key informants have been advocating for women’s justice and reparations needs or supported their reintegration and recovery. I conducted seven individual interviews and two informal conversations with informants. Each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes to one hour and happened in the informants’ offices.
Figure 10: After an interview with His Grace Archbishop John Baptist Odama in 2019
(Photo by Sister Kevin Anyeko)

Figure 11: After an interview with Lawirwodi Rwot David Onen Acana II in 2019
(Photo by Simon Okello)
The third method used was focus group discussions (FGDs). Four FGDs were conducted with thirty-one women who reunited and those who did not with the fathers of their children. Group sizes ranged from six to ten participants each. Two FGDs with each category happened in Gulu town and two were done in rural areas (Awach and Palaro Sub Counties). Agreed upon ground rules were discussed at the beginning, such as respect of each other’s opinions, no interrupting others, and so on. Each FGD lasted for one and a half to two and a half hours and addressed three main areas: 1) Why women reunited or not with their children’s fathers; 2) How they make those decisions; and 3) What justice and reparations look like for them and their children considering harms endured.

Figure 12: Focus group discussion with participants  
(Photo by Author)
Wang oo (storytelling circles) was the fourth data collection method used. Two wang oo\textsuperscript{52} with fifteen participants were carried out in Gulu town and Palaro Sub County. This was a mixed group of women described under participant category above. Storytelling is a practice that is embedded in native Acholi ways of preserving stories and sharing information usually around a bonfire (wang oo). Given the trauma and stigma women face in the community, ‘interactive group work, storytelling and art are healing methodologies’ (Chilisa 2012). In my past work with women in northern Uganda as team leader for gender justice at JRP and as a research assistant for Dr. Baines on a project on women and war in northern Uganda (Baines 2016), participants in the storytelling projects reported feeling relieved and healed through narrating their experiences. For example, the creation of the WAN was possible by the healing, empowering and confidence building aspects of storytelling (Anyeko and Hoffman 2020). Women’s positive response to storytelling, and the experience in this research was significant because it allowed open, deep, and uninterrupted narration of lived experiences of war and what justice and reparations meant to women. Participants responded to and built on each other’s stories in encouraging and uplifting ways. Focused themes were used to guide these wang oo about survivor’s senses of justice and reparations, and their decision making on reunion or not.

Lastly, field notes that included written personal reflections formed part of my data collection activity. Field notes allowed me to write my observations, interactions and nuances that arose during the day. I had informal conversations with people at daytime, sometimes with a few questions in between, that were insightful. For example, I had a conversation with Reverend Father Okun Lagoro,\textsuperscript{53} the Chairperson of WAN, my research assistant, and others in Gulu that contributed to data that I wrote down as field notes. I first heard about justice as a lived thing in a conversation with Fr. Lagoro in the corridors of the Diocese. These field notes included content of such conversations and my personal reflections. Although I was not writing nor recording these conversations, they were very insightful and enriched data. These conversations and

\textsuperscript{52} Wang oo is an Acholi traditional bonfire or campfire where families or communities sit around and share stories (boko ododo), riddles (koc), folktales (carolok) and chat about family matters in need of attention.

\textsuperscript{53} I met Father Lagoro in Archbishop Odama’s office in Gulu. We chatted for a long time, and he generously invited me to have lunch with them as I waited for Archbishop’s secretary to schedule appointment for an interview.
writing of field notes commenced data analysis while I was still in the field. It was at this point that I started exploring the concept of lived justice that became a theory that grounded this research.

### 3.6 Language

The research was conducted in Acholi language and translated to English. I personally translated into Acholi all guiding questions, topics for FGDs, consent forms, recruitment notices, letters of initial contact, and communications related to the research. Acholi (or Luo) is my mother tongue, and it is the language spoken by all participants in Gulu. I recruited and trained a research assistant who spoke both English and Acholi. It is important to note that nuances, sayings, and data were likely lost in translation processes given the Acholi language is complex with one word having many interpretations or certain English words nearly absent in the dialect. For instance, there is no single word for rape\(^{54}\) in Acholi, but I have used descriptive phrases such as ‘sleeping with someone by force’ or ‘he slept with me’ that the women used to describe their experiences. Some women reported that the LRA had their own slangs to refer to the experience of rape and sexual violence. For example, *yecu kavera manyen* (tearing a new plastic bag) elaborated in the previous chapter. Most participants spoke only the Acholi language except fewer than five who knew both English and Acholi.

### 3.7 Data Analysis and Writing

Data analysis was an ongoing process during and after fieldwork. I used an inductive approach to data analysis that involves a process of coding informed by a grounded theory approach (Merriam and Tisdell 2016). Grounded theory includes simultaneous data collection and analysis, coding and comparative methods (Charmaz 2000). Grounded theory or inductive data analysis approach of open coding and comparison were primarily developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990), alongside others like Charmaz (2000). Likewise, categorization in grounded

\(^{54}\) Rape is described as *butu tek tek, diyo dano kit me butu, tim anywar, nywaro dako, tim alany*, and so on.
theory, a process that I used, ‘is manifested primarily in the development and comparison of concepts and categories (Maxwell 2012, 120).’ Data was recorded, translated, and transcribed, a process that started while in Uganda during Phase Two (data collection). Emerging themes such as ‘love on top of mercy,’ basic needs, compensation and land as justice were identified during Phase Two. Upon returning to Canada, I embarked on an in-depth manual open coding of data and organized it on Excel spreadsheets.

Coding particularly helped me define and categorize my data (Charmaz 2000). From the codes identified, themes were developed that informed data interpretation. Comparisons were made between participants who reunited with their forced “husbands” and those who did not, connections were identified among various categories and how that weaved into the emergence of lived justice theory. Coding, development of categories and comparisons were critical processes that allowed establishment of relationships between these intersecting concepts in addressing research questions.

Each oral history and key informant interview, focus group discussion, and wang oo transcripts were read and re-read one at a time and coded. Individual oral histories were read to get a whole picture of the message the participant was putting across, something that coding overlooks. Reading a participant’s interview transcript allowed me to draw connections between her wartime experience of forced marriage, the impact it had on her life and how that informed her conceptualization of needs-based, compensation-based, or relationship-based justice. For example, participants demanded land, compensation, and education scholarships in one interview that illustrates the holistic nature of lived justice. In addition, themes that emerged in the initial workshop or individual interviews were discussed in groups and opinions sought through key informant interviews. All these processes allowed in-depth analysis and interpretation of data. With this ongoing analysis, a storyline, and preliminary findings around a theory of lived justice became eminent. A brief descriptive outline of this dissertation was developed following a thorough review of literature as presented in Chapter One. The outline was shared with my supervisors, and with their feedback, a detailed outline of each chapter was developed and written, one at a time. It took me two years to finish writing this dissertation with a back-and-
forth review and feedback from my supervisory committee members. I reflect on my positionality next.

3.8 Positionality

I am a female Ugandan Acholi, the seventh of my mother’s ten children, born and raised in Gulu district, the location of this research. In this section, I reflect on who I am, how my multiple identities as a researcher coming from a North American university and a conflict survivor impacted my research both positively and negatively. My identities made me both an insider and outsider in Gulu as described below.

3.8.1 Ethnicity

All participants and I have a shared tribal identity. We are the Acholi people from Gulu district. This may seem an automatic ticket to my research being welcomed and supported by all participants. Mostly, I remain forever grateful to those who welcomed me and accepted to be part of my study, but our shared ethnic identity couldn’t have worked alone to make this research successful for both participants I knew before and those I met for the first time in this research. For example, in one of the rural locations, women spent the first fifteen minutes of the focus group discussion complaining on how people came, talked to them, offered them sodas (pop) and biscuits (cookies) but they got nothing. Yet I was there with my sodas and biscuits as well. Many things raced through my mind as I sat still in one of the women’s huts listening to their complaints. For a moment, I wondered why the women consented to participate if they were that upset with researchers. Another thought was to cancel the FGD as I had done that before in past research. But as someone who had worked in Gulu for years, I felt that I had a responsibility to listen to them. And I did. Given that the women knew me before the research, I felt that I was not only being treated as an outsider by this incident, but also an insider whom women could comfortably voice their concerns to. As mentioned, I had been working with this women’s group since 2011 and I knew many group members although some faces were new. When they were done complaining, I responded to most of the issues raised to my best ability and checked if they
still wanted to continue with the meeting or not. Interestingly, they agreed to proceed. That experience demonstrated to me that having a shared tribal identity alone is inadequate. It can work in combination with other factors such as previously established relationships of trust with participants and strong research background.

3.8.2 Conflict Experience

I am also a war survivor as you might have read from previous chapters. I saw how the war unfolded, I heard various sounds of war weapons, I heard people’s cries for help, and saw human remains on the streets. I lived through it. But I could not be as brave as the women in this study. I thank God that I survived, with all my siblings and parents. My identity as a war survivor connected me to the participants and it is one of the key reasons that led me to pursue this research topic as I felt I still needed to do something to improve the situation even if from an academic lens. I personally narrowly escaped abduction countless times. For example, between March and April 1996, the rebels made several attempts to abduct us from City Dorm that housed over 400 young girls at Sacred Heart School in Gulu. Even if my family lived in a tiny, rented room on one meal a day in Jinja town, it felt safe. We survived. I returned to work in Gulu years later with the women who were abducted. As I listened to their experiences, I imagined that it could have been me. I have never had closure to these experiences because my life and career has revolved around home, my peers and war survivors.

As I did my workshops, oral history interviews and focus group discussions, the thought of “it could have been me” still lingered and made the research stressful. I recognize that everyone in northern Uganda were impacted by the war differently including my participants and I but it’s our shared experience. In most meetings, for those who didn’t know me prior to this research, I told them that I survived the conflict too and that leveled the grounds and enhanced trust. But also, I returned to do this research in Uganda with hard-earned privileges as an experienced NGO worker and funder who came from a Western university pursuing doctoral education. I revisit education below, but I do not want to rule out the possibilities that my participants saw me as a powerful person and could have influenced their responses to my questions. However, as I reflect
later, as an experienced researcher on northern Uganda, transferable, respectful, and inclusive research skills helped me to meaningfully do the research. For example, I always assured participants that they were the experts, and I was there to learn from their stories without which my research cannot happen. Surviving the conflict was only one element of my relationship with participants.

3.8.3 Gender and Age

I am a female researcher in the same age group as my participants. As a middle-aged woman, most participants seemed comfortable to talk to me as a friend or sister\textsuperscript{55} because most of them were in their 30s or 40s. Age is an important factor in Acholi as older women feel shame discussing sex related challenges with younger people. Young people can also be researchers with older women but other factors such as gender, social class, language, experience in research and a well thought out consent process are crucial. My age and gender had significance on how I interacted with women as participants. Both the young and old, seemed comfortable to share personal accounts of sexual violence although this was also because of an existing relationship of trust I had with them. My gender and age contributed to power balance between me and participants. This was also the case for Yolande Bouka (2015) and her respondents in Rwanda. Even if I never asked women about their sexual violence experiences, in activities like the \textit{wang oo}, they shared such stories. To add, in rural Acholi, a man may become suspicious if his wife is seen having a one-on-one conversation with a male. I recall one of my male colleagues at Gulu District NGO Forum was confronted by a woman’s husband as he conducted an individual interview in Atiak sub county in 2007. The man accused my colleague of flirting with his wife, yet we were basically documenting the 1995 massacre that happened in Atiak (Liu Institute for Global Issues and Gulu District NGO Forum 2007). Since I personally did all the data collection in this study, I never experienced this. Instead, I met husbands to the women who wanted to be part of the study.

\textsuperscript{55} It is common in Acholi for women of the same age group to refer to each other as sisters even if they are not related by blood. Older women refer to young women as \textit{nyara} (my daughter) or \textit{ci-woda} (my daughter in law), and younger women refer to older ones as \textit{mego} (mother).
3.8.4 Race

As a Black local researcher, I did not draw obvious attention from crowds as white researchers did in Gulu. Often white researchers would be seen as donors who came to recruit war-affected people for funding or scholarships and other support. Being a researcher who worked with a funding agency, the Uganda Fund before coming to UBC, some participants with knowledge of my former role continued to perceive me as such. I thought I did a good job with the informed consent and recruitment process, but participants still asked for funding, scholarships for children and livelihood support. This was common at the end of research activities when I asked if they had any questions before ending. Women succinctly told me that they knew I was a student who didn’t have resources, but since I am studying in Canada, and worked with a funding agency, I had connections that I could use to raise funding for them from well-wishers.

Further, other participants said they hope that when I finish my studies, I can find a job and return to support them the way I used to. As I discuss in this thesis, most women felt compensation, land, and ability to meet basic needs such as housing, education for their children and medical were forms of justice they wanted to live. Their constant request to me to connect them to funding opportunities or to finish my studies and help them raise support is inextricably linked to their desire to achieve this sense of justice and reparation. But also, being an insider (or perceived to be) can make participants assume that you already know the issues you are asking. For example, Yolande Bouka (2015) reflected on how being a Black female researcher in Rwanda made participants assume she was Rwandese and knowledgeable about what she was asking so she had to clarify that she is not Rwandese. My experience was similar as participants who knew me openly told me that ‘you already know our issues.’ I did know some of the issues due to my previous work, but I had to explain to such participants that I wanted to learn what had changed, what insights they had so that I can write them down. Therefore, it was still important for them to share their views.
3.8.5 Education

The other part of my identity that was significant in this research was my education and level of engagement. Coming as a student from Canada had an impact even if I am a war-affected Acholi from Gulu. Despite being schooled under harsh conditions of war and poverty, I feel fortunate for opportunities my community members did not have. To have that one room in Jinja town that I called home was a privilege. Being displaced to Jinja was a blessing as I was able to finish secondary school and little did I know I would one day travel the world, and study in the United States and Canada. When I finished University in 2005 and went to work in Gulu, some community members saw me as *dano ma wake* (a proud person) because of my education. Being proud in this context meant that one who is boastful and feels good about what they have over others. Evelyn Amony (2015) mentions this in her memoire “I Am Evelyn Amony.” But Evelyn and her counterparts later learnt that I wasn’t proud or being a boastful educated woman, but I was struggling with the difficulty of stories they shared with me. I often excused myself, went and cried behind a hut during storytelling about the war with women and I didn’t know it was sending a wrong message to them, as they thought I was uninterested. So sometimes, being educated leads to a negative perception of being boastful. But some years later, it positively enhanced trust from the women as they felt proud that their own “sister” was the one doing this research. Pride in Acholi is termed *awaka*. Women told me that they have *awaka madit* (big pride) in seeing me engage in this level of scholarship. Adding that, they know that I will have their interest at heart since I am one of their own. It is common for the educated, and people who have lived out of the community for some time to be treated as outsiders when they go back home, but I was welcomed in most areas due to my previous relationships.

3.8.6 Language

The ability to speak the native Acholi language placed me in a good position to do this research. I have worked as a research assistant and translator to many foreign researchers before, but it was less time consuming to conduct the research activities in Acholi language without back-and-forth translations that usually make interviews long. I recorded all my data and did not worry
about translations during research activities. There were sayings or words that participants used that were new to me, and I asked them for clarification immediately. For example, *min oyo opilo too pi latine*. It is a saying that directly translates as ‘the mother of the rat called *opilo* will die for the sake of its child’ (elaborated in Chapter Four). We had an interesting discussion that would have been hard if I didn’t know the language. Sometimes a lot of information gets lost in translations. Even if I worked with a research assistant fluent in Acholi to help with transcription, I went back and listened to any portions of the recording that were unclear to double check that translations were accurate. In sum, language is such a powerful tool for accuracy. It is a point of connection with participants, builds relationships and make participants feel at ease with researchers without worry of a translator not doing a great job during research activities. There could be gaps with how I translated participants’ views but having a research assistant transcribe and translate data helped to address these gaps and bias. I also checked with friends, family, and former colleagues what their interpretations of certain words were for accuracy.

### 3.8.7 Past Work Experience

As previously mentioned, I worked in northern Uganda in various capacities since 2001. I went to collect data with this in mind, but I was aware that this was not a natural consideration given the war-affected people are generally tired of researchers and journalists. Gulu district is an over-researched area. People have research fatigue. For example, one participant had this to say: ‘they [researchers] took records of the attendance and the interview we did. The records go but never return to us. They keep coming and interviewing us and we get no results and feedback. We ignored but had decided not to go to any meetings organized by anyone because we do not get anything out of the meetings.’ It was not uncommon for me to hear such complaints from participants right from the time I worked as a researcher at Gulu District NGO Forum from 2006-2009 exploring conflict experiences, justice and peace needs of grassroots communities in the IDP camps as the peace negotiation between the Ugandan government and the rebels happened.

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56 Focus group discussion, Awach Sub County, Gulu district, September 13th, 2019.
Most of my work in Northern Uganda was practice oriented in non-profits, funding and relief agencies that provided goods and services to the war-affected, including some women who participated in this study. This work put me in an advantaged position as I had transferable research skills including responding to participants like the one cited above who seemed tired of researchers. I have learned over the years that explaining the goals and importance of research in generating new knowledge, even if they may not directly benefit participants, often got their buy-in for research. In some of my past work such as the storytelling initiatives, once WAN women realized that the project was for them, and not primarily knowledge extraction, they started contributing drinks and hosting sessions in their homes instead of expecting the NGO to do it.

Participants with whom I had previously established relationships, such as WAN groups, government and local leaders welcomed me and enabled the success of this research. For example, it was quite smooth and quick for me to make appointments with informants. This would have been harder if I were going to Gulu for the first time. In fact, one informant told me that I was lucky to have interviewed the District Chairperson and the Archbishop as they have been trying for a long time to get appointments with them without success. Further, my personal friendship and continuous relationship with the Chairperson of WAN, Evelyn, was instrumental to this research. I worked with Evelyn since 2009 on several projects including leading the research and translation of her book, “I Am Evelyn Amony.” Evelyn provided me and my research assistant connections to women’s groups and occasionally accompanied me to observe and offer solidarity in research activities. These existing work relationships I had with women and experience as a researcher in difficult settings provided me with the strong ethical and practical knowledge that made me effectively manage this study.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

It is important to be aware of, and understand how we influence and are influenced by the world we study, an act of reflexivity (Maxwell 2012). With over a decade of action-oriented research experience, I went to collect data cognizant that even those who have done research for all their
lives make mistakes and I must employ reflexivity. I had also learnt several ethical principles during past research in Uganda and through my formal education at UBC and previous universities where I studied research methods. From January to April 2021, I had the opportunity to teach a graduate research methods course at UBC that provided deeper insights and reflection as I wrote this thesis. Despite drawing a lot on case studies from my past research in Uganda, I realized that learning never ends as I developed better research and writing skills as I engaged with my students. Research is not always perfect, but I ensured that certain protocols and principles were undertaken in this research as explained below:

3.9.1 Informed Consent

I ensured that participants had enough information about this research before deciding to participate or not. I developed consent forms and translated them into Acholi and applied to UBC Research Ethics Board before going to Uganda for fieldwork. A separate consent form was designed for each data collection method, for each participant to sign. At each research activity, introductions of the researcher and participant(s), detailed explanations on research topic and objectives were done. By this time, voluntary recruitment had already taken place as described earlier. I again went through the consent form with participants and let them decide whether they still wanted to participate without pressure. Those who agreed to participate were invited to sign the form. Given most participants did not know how to read and write, I sought consent orally by explaining the research and recording their voices when they agreed to participate. The oral consent process was most common with women, but I told them that there were both options to consider. Given the oral tradition in Acholi, even if it wasn’t for writing and reading literacy, oral consent worked much more effectively than written. Participants had freedom to withdraw from the study at any time even after initial agreement without repercussions. There were a few incidences especially for focus group discussions where participants didn’t show up because they had either travelled or changed their minds, and it was okay with me to respect their decisions. They never gave any prior information about this change, but they just didn’t show up, and I was aware of how common and normal it was for that to happen in Gulu. It is for this reason that some of my FGDs ended up with fewer participants.
I also requested participants’ permission to take notes, photos and record their voices. All participants agreed to record their voices after I explained that I could not write at the speed at which they were talking, hence I needed to record. They were informed that the voice file would be used only for research purposes and be erased after transcription. Participants didn’t have problems with me taking notes either. But a couple of them did not want their photos to be taken. They complained about past photos being taken and misused without their understanding of the photographer’s intentions. One participant whom I had met for the first time in my initial workshop told me her photos had been taken and used to raise funding, yet she never received any benefits from the funds. Although most participants stated that they knew I was a researcher who would not use their photos for other purposes except the research, I decided to take very few photos to avoid any confusions.

3.9.2 Confidentiality

Participants had endured stigma already and the last thing I wanted to do was to exacerbate this. To ensure confidentiality of information gathered, pseudonyms were used at the onset of data collection. Details about pseudonyms and data gathered were securely stored and locked at UBC and erased from my computer. As I wrote my dissertation, I used pseudonyms and any clues that could expose the identity of participants such as place of residence were changed for confidentiality purposes. During every research activity, I reminded participants that confidentiality was important, but it was hard in focus group discussions and storytelling. Participants were informed of the challenge of guaranteeing full confidentiality in group settings. For example, in one village, as I walked with the group leader through the center to one of the women’s huts for a focus group discussion, I overheard someone ask, ‘where are all these women going?’ Another responded, ‘they are going for a meeting of people who returned from the bush.’ I wondered where they learned that but when I spoke to a representative of WAN, she told me that the blue T-Shirts the women wore was already known in the community as for women who returned from the bush. But it is also likely that one of the group members shared the purpose of the meeting before it had happened. Still, I emphasized during the meeting that
they should keep issues discussed within the group. I also discussed confidentially issues with my research assistant and had him sign a confidentiality agreement.

3.9.3 Do No Harm

Participants had suffered different levels of trauma during the war, underwent various recovery initiatives, and do not desire to relive such experiences. Narrating pain is healing to some, but it is opening old wounds and traumatizing for others. I attempted to avoid opening old wounds by asking questions that aimed at understanding what happened after women had left the rebel group and returned home, not about the violence they experienced. However, sometimes women willingly brought such stories to the conversations to inform their decision-making. At times women cried as they told their stories. I already had experience dealing with these situations from my past work. I also have psychosocial background through my psychology degree that I employed to help calm the atmosphere and make the women comfortable. I let them cry whenever they wanted, offered breaks from the activities, and checked with them if they wanted to stop or continue. Most times, they preferred to continue and finish telling the stories they wanted me to hear. I called and visited some of the women after our meetings to check how they were coping. I asked participants at the end of the activity how they felt, but I got the opposite of what I expected to hear. I was even considering referring some of them for psychosocial counselling but instead they told me that they were fine. In fact, participants told me they felt relieved after talking to me during the research as they had been going through challenges and hadn’t got opportunities to share them with anyone. They also told me that it would be good to do such activities often as it gives them opportunities to meet each other and share stories. Some NGOs like the Justice and Reconciliation Project used to facilitate storytelling, but they stopped due to funding challenges. The following quotes illustrate this feedback:

What you are doing here with us should not stop today. Because it helps us to discuss issues that affect us, and it eases the heartache inside us...when I am going back home today, at least am going feeling much better because of talking to you. Sometimes I get
lost in thoughts, thinking about a lot of things with so much heartache, but I don’t know where to start from.\textsuperscript{57}

This research is good because it helps people to understand why we went back to our husbands and why some of us did not go back.\textsuperscript{58}

I thank God for bringing you here for us to share our experiences.\textsuperscript{59}

Many times, we forget about our own wellbeing during research and worry about participants. Hearing women’s experiences and difficulties they face were still stressful despite my experience documenting and researching difficult issues including massacres in Uganda. Something that affected me during this research was the fact that the situation had not improved much as far as women and their children’s needs are concerned despite all the work that my colleagues and I at the JRP, WAN, Gulu NGO Forum, Uganda Fund, and other institutions had done in the region.

Nearly 15 years later as I write, things hadn’t significantly changed. When I asked women what their senses of justice and reparations were, they told me they wanted land, compensation, and school fees for their children. These are the same things women have been asking for many years ago except that this time, they framed it as justice and reparation. The thought that not much has changed was stressful. But some stories shared were stressful too as I occasionally had nightmares about rebel abductions. But Gulu is my home. This meant that I had a support network (family and friends) that helped me through this. Going to my mum after a long day and having an Acholi meal like lakotokoto (ground sesame mixed with beef) together or going for a drink with my sister Immaculate was relieving.

3.9.4 Non-judgement, Respect for Privacy and Dignity of Participants

I ensured respect for privacy and dignity of women by conducting research activities in private environments where women felt comfortable. I was flexible with the location of interviews

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{57} Focus group discussion, Gulu Town, August 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 2019. \textsuperscript{58} Oral history interview, Gulu Town, September 10\textsuperscript{th}, 2019. \textsuperscript{59} Wang oo, Gulu Town, Oct 11\textsuperscript{th}, 2019.}
depending on what they wanted. In many cases, I went to their homes while their children were in school and there was no one else at home. I made sure that no one was present at the interview except the woman alone and did the interviews in quiet places. No one likes to be judged by others. For this reason, I avoided any judgmental acts or words. My questions were sensitively framed in ways that allowed open narration of stories and views without letting participants have any sense of being judged by the study. I asked questions using non-discriminatory, blaming, or stigmatizing words to women. I avoided leading questions or interjecting words that would leave participants feeling frustrated (see Appendix B for questions asked). I also let participants know at the beginning of the exercise that there were no wrong responses, and they should feel free to share their perspectives on the subject without any fears.

3.9.5 Acknowledgements and Communication of Results

Participants often feel abandoned by researchers once research ends. Sometimes this desertion happens as soon as data collection is done. While it was hard to satisfy every participant’s expectation as they joined the research, I appreciated all efforts they put in to support this study by individually thanking them at the end of each research activity. I also acknowledged them in this dissertation because without them, this study could not be conducted. On May 31st and June 1st, 2021, I conducted validation and dissemination workshops in collaboration with two community-based organizations the WAN and Watyer Ki Gen. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this event was done in a hybrid format (online and in Uganda). It was attended by over seventy participants including women and stakeholders involved in the study, government, religious, cultural, non-governmental representatives, and policy makers. The workshop was funded by UBC’s Public Scholar’s Initiative. This workshop disseminated results and generated recommendations for justice and reparations in Uganda as presented in Chapter Eight. As a way of giving back, I supported the two organizations in writing their paragraphs to join a team of partners invited by the ICC to submit requests for reparations considering the 2021 sentencing of former LRA commander Dominic Ongwen by the court. The woman member of parliament (MP) of Gulu attended the event and committed to following up issues raised by the women and my research with the Parliament of Uganda. As part of the dissemination activities, the two
organizations conducted a joint radio talk show to reignite justice and reparations debates over a local radio station. A video recording of the event, a policy report and a podcast will be circulated to spread the findings of the study and influence policy and program advocacy on women’s justice and reparations.\textsuperscript{60}

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research methodology and methods. The study was inspired by and adopted African methodologies that centers lived experiences of participants. For example, I employed data collection methods like oral history interviews, \textit{wang oo} and focus group discussions that allows deep narration of experiences, resonates with Acholi ways of knowing and passing information from one generation to another. In the next four chapters, thick narratives of women’s stories have been incorporated in the thesis, and this was due to the methods used. This chapter also offered reflections on my positionality as a black Acholi woman who survived the conflict and was returning to do fieldwork at home from a Canadian institution with a long history of work in the region. These multiple identities of mine intersected in ways that made me feel (and to be perceived as) both an insider and outsider. The chapter also described data analysis and theoretical conceptualization that involved an inductive process drawn from grounded theory. The chapter ended with a description of ethical considerations such as informed consent, do no harm and confidentiality used to ensure respectful research. In the next four chapters, I discuss study results structured around four senses of justice: place-based justice (Chapter Five), compensation and needs-based justice (Chapter Six), and relationship-based justice (Chapter Seven). The next chapter presents factors that influenced women’s decision to continue, or end forced marriage with rebel commanders (Chapter Four).

\textsuperscript{60} These are in the process of being completed and will be published later.
Chapter 4: ‘Love On Top of Mercy’: Decision Making After Forced Marriage and Sexual Violence

4.1 Introduction

When you are abducted, you can have a lot of anger in your heart as you feel that your future has been ruined. But love is also big headed. It squeezes its way in there too. Childbirth also squeezes its way in. It is mercy. It is forgiveness you have done to that man because there is no happiness in it. It changes very slowly and eventually turns into happiness......I called it *maa I wii kica* (love on top of mercy) because I did not like it as people say that you appreciate someone the moment you see them. He was just there among the soldiers. I never even noticed him. We fell in love amidst harsh conditions. I decided it to be called that way because feelings are powerful. So, it is the mercy that you give to your husband to make all those things work, I didn’t really have the first sight impression as is always experienced by people.61

Laber was abducted by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) rebels in 1995 and spent seven years in captivity before returning home. The first man she was given to as a wife died in a battle. She later entered a relationship with her current husband who had four wives.62 Laber returned home with one child born in captivity. Her relationship with her husband was not all smooth as the above quote shows. Like other participants in this study, Laber continued this relationship with her husband after returning home and had three more children with him. Her husband married her through a traditional wedding ceremony that includes the payment of bride price. Bride price, according to Samuel Ihuoma Nwatu & Edwin Ifeanyi Nwogugu, (2018, 1) ‘refers to money, goods or other property provided by the groom or his family to the bride’s family in consideration of the marriage.’ It is a very common practice among the Acholi people of northern Uganda, and many African countries. Laber’s experience is a unique love story compared to how people start marital relationships in the everyday. It is love that emanated in a violent environment. She describes her feelings on the day of the *nyom* (traditional wedding):

62 In traditional Acholi, a man can have more than one wife through a practice called polygamy and the LRA emulated it.
When he went to our home, I could not believe that such things could happen to me because if you see where we stayed together with him, and how our love relationship began and grew up to [the point of] him deciding to go up to my parents, I could not believe such a thing [nyom] was happening. But I was filled with happiness because I could not expect that [nyom].

Initially, Laber was in a dilemma regarding whether or not to continue the relationship with the father of her children. She was abducted, forced to be with the LRA, and felt unhappy and angry that her future had been ruined. Despite being angry at the commander for keeping her as a wife in rebel captivity, she went through a process of forgiveness and finding happiness that she described as something that she slowly arrived to. To Laber, the dilemmas and anger of having a ruined future, being forced to bear children in captivity on one hand, was countered with opportunities to formalize the relationship through a marriage ceremony that she described as a point of happiness she arrived to on the other. Forgiveness, a practice rooted in Acholi culture, allowed her to gain some happiness from her relationship with this former LRA commander.

In the LRA, if a man died in a battle, his wives were given chances to court and choose which commander they wanted to have as their next husband. But it was not always the case. For example, Lakalatwe was forcefully given to a second, and a third husband against her will. Women’s narratives indicated that the majority of those who reunited with men after returning home from captivity had lost a first husband and had a courtship opportunity with the next man like Laber did. However, these opportunities were not like normal courtship circumstances in Acholi because they happened in a violent setting where the woman had very limited or no choices at all. In fact, to most women, they would have preferred returning home after their first “husbands” died or even prior.

Despite love with mercy, both Laber and her husband face several reintegration challenges. They are stigmatized and labelled rebels in the neighborhood they live in near Gulu town. Laber returned home when her family was still living in Pabbo IDP camp. Coincidentally, the rebels attacked the camp and killed seven people. That exacerbated the stigma Laber and her family

63 Oral history interview, Gulu town, September 11th, 2019.
faced in Pabbo because the community accused her of returning with a gun from the bush and, that the rebels attacked them in retaliation. She had to move to Gulu town after that incident. Her husband has no access to his ancestral land in Pabbo, Amuru district, as he was away from home for a long time.64

Another story that I want to highlight is that of Langec. Unlike Laber, Langec rejected her “husband” upon returning home. She always looked forward to that moment of freedom from her ruthless “husband.” Langec’s “husband” was so brutal. More than half of the sixty-one women who participated in this study, including those who reunited after their return, spoke about the beatings, insults, humiliation, and torture they endured in the hands of their “husbands”. In Langec’s words:

That was beyond beating. Each day I would be beaten about ten strokes. Even if you do a tiny thing like moving a pen like this [illustrates], he will ask, ‘who moved this pen? Lie down...’ The worst thing that this man did to me was... He got his feces and mixed it with some herbs for me to drink on the basis that it was medicine for barrenness. That I was not giving birth... On the last day when we separated with him, he beat some woman to death. She was my co wife.... He just liked beating women every day. He used to behave as though he was possessed by some evil spirit. So, I decided not to stay with him because such a person is not good, imagine someone who picks his own feces for you to eat, that means he can also poison you to death.65

Langec was abducted by the rebels in 1989 and spent fifteen years in captivity before escaping and returning home. Her “husband” had eight wives. She is currently a single woman in her 60s and has spent sixteen years at home since escaping abduction. Langec was the eldest participant who returned home with no child. As you will read in this chapter, children were the primary reasons most women reunited with the men, but Langec stated that even if she had returned with children from this man, she would never reunite with him because he tortured her. Langec said

64 In Acholi, land ownership is communal and accessed through paternal families in a particular clan. However, certain individuals eventually claim specific ties to certain portions of the land that they have been farming on for a long time. They are called okang. Laber’s husband did not have his okang as he was with the rebels and accessing his paternal land remains a challenge for him and his family that he returned with from the LRA.
65 Oral history interview, Gulu town, September 26th, 2019.
she forgave the man for what he did but reuniting with him will never cross her mind. When I asked her if she ever thought of reuniting, her response was:

Never. It didn’t come. I don’t even think about it. Even tomorrow, I will not. I would rather die if being without a man kills people. I accept to be the example to all, that being without a man leads to one’s death. So, if it doesn’t lead to one’s death, then I am doing just fine.66

Even if it meant she faced death, I understand this statement by Langec to be an act of refusal to conform to Acholi marriage practices that devalue women and reproduce gender inequality. She wants to set a precedent to others, to show that one does not have to stay in an abusive marriage because of stigma of the unmarried. Afterall, according to Langec, being without a man does not result in death. Langec is one of six out of nine oral history interview study participants that were not together with the men they were forced to be with in captivity. Two of these nine participants had initially reunited upon returning home but had to leave the relationships for reasons like the men remained violent, had many wives,67 and neglected their childcare responsibilities, among others. Laber is one of four oral history interview participants that were still together with the fathers of their children by the time of the study. In the two focus group discussions and two storytelling circles, more than half of participants didn’t reunite with the men.

The experiences of women like Laber and Langec are at the core of this dissertation. No previous studies have meticulously focused on why and how women make decisions to continue with or end wartime forced marriages on exiting captivity. Even in the gruesomeness of violence, love and happiness can develop gradually through a process of (re)negotiation of personal feelings of conflict-related sexual violence survivors as they relate with their families, children, communities, and fathers of their children. The experiences of four out of nine oral history interview participants who reunited back this finding. However, very few of these relationships are sustainable as results show that the majority fail overtime. For example, in one focus group

66 Oral history interview, Gulu town, September 26th, 2019
67 Polygamy, a practice of having many wives in Acholi is currently uncommon because of HIV Aids and poverty that makes it hard for the man to meet all the needs of his many wives. This informed decisions to end relationships that started in captivity by some women.
discussion with women who had reunited, only two out of eight participants were still together with their “husbands.” The rest had reunited but ended the relationships.

Questioning the sustainability of reunions, Angela Atim of Watyer Ki Gen, had this to say: ‘most of these relationships have not worked. For example, they [the couple] would stay in the same house for six months without talking to each other. They would do their own things but when a visitor comes to their home, they would all come and greet with smiling faces.’ According to Angela, some of the women reunited with the men to revenge to other co-wives, not because they wanted the men. Senior wives were brutal to younger wives and had more authority in captivity. To revenge and show victory over senior wives, younger wives reunited with the men. And some men have been taking advantage of women who work hard to care for the children. Angela continues to note that many women reunited as a relationship trial, to see if the man will support the children’s needs but often the men didn’t. Women struggled to keep up appearances but the pressure to be married pushed some of them to go back to these men or seek new relationships that often failed as they are not doing it for themselves, but for others.

As the stories of six out of nine women like Langec who participated in oral history interviews show, the first part of this chapter explores torture, lack of consent, beatings, and brutal punishments by rebel commanders as factors that informed participants’ decision to end these relationships upon returning home. However, as I will discuss in the second part of the chapter, love with mercy, stigma, children, and rejection were among factors that informed the decisions of women like Laber to continue with the fathers of their children post abduction. I argue that women’s decision to reunite or not depended on whether love developed, and the difficulty navigating complex kinship ties with commanders, their children, extended families, and communities that they found themselves trapped in. For example, where love developed like Laber’s, it involved a process of slowly forgiving and mercifully accepting the commander. For women like Langec, this never happened as she asserted a sense of freedom from torture, force and harm experienced in captivity.

68 Key informant interview, Gulu town, October 12th, 2019
4.2 Factors That Influence Women’s Decision to End Forced Marriage

Some studies reported that women do not want anything to do with the fathers of their children born in captivity because they were forced into these marriages (Shanahan and Veale 2016; Porter 2013; Kiconco 2015). Other studies cite hatred and unresolved conflicts (Aijazi and Baines 2017), the “marriages” were seen as perversions, unrecognized and non-binding socially, legally and traditionally (Carlson and Mazurana 2008; Jain 2008) and mothers found no support at home (Coulter 2009). My study provides one of the first in depth considerations of how women’s lived experiences of wartime forced marriage and sexual violence shaped their decision making. In what follows, I draw on the concept of love with mercy for women who rejected commanders post abduction. Particularly, I explore factors that did not enable love with mercy to develop such as lack of consent, hate, torture, and responsibility for wrong doings among others. These factors influenced women’s decision to end forced marriages.

Figure 13: Members of the Women’s Advocacy Network in Gulu (Photo by Ketty)
4.2.1 ‘I Was Just Forced’: Consent

Nearly all participants who did not reunite with the fathers of their children who had also since returned home said that one of the deciding factors was the fact that they did not voluntarily consent to those relationships. They were forced. In the words of Lamaro: ‘I didn’t reunite with the man I stayed with from there. I was just forced. I was just abducted and taken there. Besides being abducted forcefully, I was again forced to be with that person.’ Most girls were told to choose between life or death. Afraid of dying, the girls accepted to be wives to the commanders, but this did not mean they consented due to the threat of being killed if they refused the men. The violence that came with this death threat was intense. Still, Lamaro stated that the fact that they were just abducted alone shows they never wanted these men. A person under the age of eighteen years in Uganda is considered a minor unable to make informed decisions. The LRA violated the women on so many levels that participants who rejected them felt their opportunities to enter courtship as a young woman and marry a man of their choice were ruined. These women stated that even if there was no war, they would never be wives to these men. Being forced to be wives to commanders were the primary reasons for rejection for most participants.

However, there were incidences when a woman was allowed to enter an arrangement with a man especially if her given husband had died. The LRA rarely released women. If the husbands died, they passed the women on to other commanders with or without their consent. A person’s preference within the armed group was granted or denied by rebel leaders. For example, women were not allowed to “choose” to return home post their commander’s death. As a result, many women were wives to several men. Participants like Laber reunited after returning home because she had a courtship-like arrangement with the commander after the death of her first husband. Similarly, Lagulu elaborates the issue of consent after a man’s death. She had reunited with her husband but ended the relationship.

We had just entered into a mutual agreement after Okeny’s death. You know in the bush, there was a policy that once your husband dies, there is no force to move you to another

69 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 31st, 2019.
Legal and human rights conventions like the CEDAW and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights mention consent as a basis for marriage (see also Jain 2008). But women’s acceptance of commanders cannot be equated to consent as they had no choice. According to Chris Coulter (2008), women’s choices were limited especially if they had to choose between fighting, sexual abuse or death. During the Khmer Rouge’s regime in Cambodia, neither the man nor the woman or their parents consented to the marriage, making it different from the experiences in Sierra Leone and Uganda. Enforced procreation in Cambodia was the goal where over 80 couples could be forcefully married in one ceremony (O’Brien 2016). Survivors in Cambodia were left with no options but to stay in unwanted marriages or live as outcasts and shame to their families (Christensen 2016), a situation of choicelessness that continues after the end of the Khmer Rouge regime. These perspectives are relevant to this study as they demonstrate how consent is absent during wartime “marriages” and continues to influence decisions survivors make regarding these relationships post war.

4.2.2 ‘I Feel Like He is Not Dead Yet’: Hate and Torture

Most women who rejected their children’s fathers upon leaving captivity said the commanders tortured them physically, psychologically, and socially. For example, acts of forced nudity or telling little girls to strip naked for commanders to see if they had started growing pubic hair subjected the women to mental torture. Langec’s forced husband often insulted her for being barren and attempted to have her eat his feces-an act of torture. As the experiences of sexual violence show, little girls had their private parts ruptured by brutal commanders who exclaimed how they were ‘tearing new plastic bags’ as though they were speaking of objects, not humans.

70 Oral history interview, Gulu town, September 26th, 2019.
71 “Tearing a new plastic bag” was a metaphor used by rebel commanders for breaking virginity of a little girl through sex.
The majority of participants rejected the men due to the extreme torture they underwent. For example:

Even if I were still a young girl, I doubt I would have any feelings of wanting to be with a man. The torture there (in the bush) is so serious that the married women at home are not treated that way. Therefore, women felt that it was better to stay with their children and not go back to that man even if they have children. You will feel that you rather raise your children who will help you in the future than go to a man. So, the torture that the men wielded on the women is what makes them not want to go back.\textsuperscript{72}

I understand hate is used as an emotion that depicts dislike towards a person or object. For example, Laloyo and Lakalatwe still hate the men who tortured them while in captivity despite hearing that they were killed. To these women, death was an inadequate punishment for the men who tortured them. They wished for something worse than death. This explains why some women rejected the idea of legal justice or imprisonment as punishment, as they saw it as considerably less than death. But what punishment could be greater than death? Death sentences are illegal in many countries that uphold the right to life. Life imprisonment would be the highest sentence in these countries. Uganda has not yet completely abolished death penalty although, no inmate on death row has been executed for the past two decades.\textsuperscript{73} But to these participants, a life imprisonment or death sentence would not be adequate to resolve their hate towards the men whether their death results from natural causes or is ordered by a justice making institution.

Longing for punishment greater than death, Lakalatwe wishes to erase the remains of her late husband. She speaks to his unforgivable ruthlessness: ‘If it were acceptable, I would burn Lapyem’s bones into ashes. I feel like he is not dead yet, and people are just joking.....Lapyem treated me worse than any other LRA soldier. So, it’s not easy at all.’\textsuperscript{74}

In contrast, participants reunited with commanders since they believed that they behaved the way they did because they were in a war zone, while others like Laber did so out of mercy and love.

Besides some men continuing violent and torturous behaviors post return, women like Nyapolo

\textsuperscript{72} Focus group discussions, Gulu town, August 31\textsuperscript{st}, 2019.
\textsuperscript{74} Wang oo, Gulu town, October 11\textsuperscript{th}, 2019.
left upon reflecting on how they had been tortured. She narrates: ‘then later I started thinking of what my husband did to me while in captivity and I felt very sad and angry. I suddenly started changing my mind and rejected him because when I set off to return from captivity, he said I was supposed to be killed.’ Nyapolo’s husband gave this order after learning that she had plans of escaping. Nyapolo ran away from the men who had been sent to kill her in a nearby bush. As the men chased her, they bumped into government soldiers who captured and brought them back home. The men sent to kill Nyapolo thanked her for providing them the opportunity to return home, even if it was unintentional. However, when she ran, Nyapolo left behind her six-month-old baby. Her husband later handed over the baby to civilian women found in a garden in Pajule, her village of origin, and asked them to take the baby to Nyapolo’s mother. Luckily, they were able to locate Nyapolo’s mother and reunited the baby with Nyapolo shortly after her escape. Her husband who later returned home, attempted to bring his family back together but Nyapolo’s memory of his torture led her to reject the proposed reunion, let alone her view that he was too old for her, a factor I discuss next.

4.2.3 ‘The men were too old’: Age

The age of men is a factor that was critical in the women’s decision making to reject the men they were forced to be with. Recall that most participants were abducted between the ages of seven and sixteen years and given to men who were approximately eighteen to fifty years old. Even if some men would not be considered too old, the girls were too young to be wives. The concept of love with mercy did not apply to women in this situation given age was a defining factor for ending the relationship. Besides rape being criminal in the Ugandan constitution, all LRA commanders would have to be held accountable for another criminal act called defilement if the women desired legal trials.

75 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 23rd, 2019.
76 This commander assumed that Nyapolo had been killed on his order, hence sent the child to her mother.
77 Defilement is a term used in Uganda to refer to a criminal sexual act involving a child of 18 years and below.
Early marriage was common in Acholi in the first half of the nineteenth century, but it was mostly marriage of girls in their late teens, not little girls of ages eight to thirteen years that the LRA sexually abused. In current Acholi, a woman would be embarrassed and seen as violating acceptable marriage norms by introducing a much older man as her husband. This norm led some participants to reject commanders. Some men were older than the participants’ fathers and mothers. In fact, some of the commanders had children older than the girls they forced to be their wives. Lamaro rejected the man she was forced to be with, citing age and consent as key in her decision making. I quote:

The person whom I was forced to be with was elderly. His age was almost 3 times my age. Even his children are older than me. How can I stay with such a person? How do you even point that, ‘that is my husband?’ How will your family feel? Imagine he comes to our home and my mum has to say, “this is my daughter’s husband.” How does this even happen when he is older than my mum? How can my mum call him a son-in-law? It is not proper. Those are the reasons why I did not go back to him.78

Lamaro was one of 139 schoolgirls abducted from St. Mary’s College in Aboke that I referenced in Chapter One. She returned with two children. Lamaro resumed schooling upon returning home as her mother cared for her children. Lamaro’s decision was informed by culturally based norms against early marriage in Acholi. The views of participants who rejected their husbands in rural areas were similar to Lamaro’s and her counterparts in Gulu town. I quote Labol from a rural setting who refused to continue the relationship based on age and consent.

What we had back in captivity was through force and was not my will to be with him. The men we were given to, were older and out here, it is impossible to live with them. If we were of the same age, then we could stay together. From captivity, we were just distributed to men who were much older than us. We were very young girls. We were forced to stay with these men as wives.79

78 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 31st, 2019.
79 Oral history interview, Awach Sub County, Gulu district, September 13th, 2019.
4.2.4  ‘The men died or remained in the bush’: Absence

Fifteen of the fifty-nine female participants stated that they did not reunite because they either lost their ‘husbands’ or left them alive in captivity. The study had initially intended to work with women whose ‘husbands’ had returned home. But as I went on with the recruitment and the research, I learnt that many women returned without the men, and their perspectives were important for the study particularly because these women have compounded reintegration challenges. For example, women whose ‘husbands’ died or remained in captivity have a challenge in reuniting their children with the paternal relatives because they do not know their clans of identity. Additionally, the decision to end or continue relationships that started in a war zone does not only revolve around the men, but children born in captivity. In some cases, women have continued the relationships with their children’s paternal families by remarrying a brother of their children’s father.80 Many rebel commanders who fathered participants’ children had been killed in the bush, which was among driving factors to escape and return home, but other men remained behind, fighting. Participants also reported hearing rumors that the men they left behind have since died, although some of them do not have any information on whether or not those men were still alive by the time of the study. This news was often brought by fellow abducted persons who escape and return home. Since the peace process in Juba stalled in 2008, very few children have escaped and returned home like Aleng. Aleng returned home in 2012 through Congo. Few participants said they would reunite with their “husbands” if they returned home because they had treated them well while in captivity. For example: ‘If my husband was around, I was going to go back to him because I had made up my mind to live with him way back from captivity.’81

The act of women escaping and leaving behind their “husbands” alive in captivity indicate that some of them never wanted those relationships to continue. Except for women who may have been caught in battles and brought back home by the state army or were released by their husbands so that they return the children home. Abducted women returned home in various ways

80 This practice is called wife inheritance and it is explained in Chapter Five.
81 Focus group discussion, Awach Sub County, Gulu district, September 13th, 2019.
like secretly escaping or being arrested by the government army in their military pursuit of the LRA. But other women decided to return based on how bad the men were treating them and would never reunite with them even if they returned home alive. Another factor that I discuss next that informed women’s decision making was men’s responsibility for wrongdoing.

4.2.5 ‘The men were killers’: Responsibility for wrong

Some Acholi hold spiritual beliefs associated with responsibility for, and consequences of, unaddressed wrongs. For example, it is believed that once someone from one clan killed another with neglect, the spirit of the dead will avenge its death on the killer or the killer’s kin if the killer is no longer alive. As I discussed in Chapter One, there are traditional cleansing ceremonies conducted in Acholi to respond to murder and other wrongs like mato oput reconciliation ceremony. This ceremony happens after truth telling, acknowledgement of wrong, apology, and compensation by the killer and/or his clan. It is followed by symbolic reconciliation rituals of mato oput (drinking the bitter root) between the victim and perpetrator clans. In the absence of this process, participants are often reluctant to reunite.

Some participants indicated that the men in the LRA were killers, and they did not want anything to do with them, hence exiting the relationship. It wasn’t clear whether they witnessed their husbands’ acts of murder, abduction, and mutilation. Most were in sick bays where mothers and children were kept, but others may have witnessed such once displaced from such bays during the height of the war, as they moved with commanders through Uganda. At the same time, some reported witnessing it firsthand, such as the incidences of Langec seeing her husband beating her co-wife to death, and commanders like Nyapolo’s husband ordering that she should be killed. The murder of others was intermittently mentioned by participants as a reason they did not wish to reunite, but I did not probe about that as they were voluntarily told. With this background, some participants felt that certain vengeful spirits may transfer to the children

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82 Sick bays were camps created in strategic locations such as near a water source, a good hiding spot, where pregnant and nursing mothers, children, and the injured LRA fighters lived. There was an LRA commander in charge of a sick bay. Most of these sick bays were located in South Sudan and a few in northern Uganda.
because their fathers were killers and may have stained their hands with the blood of those killed. Therefore, participants felt it was better to cut off any relationships with the men. Key informants pointed this view as well:

There are backgrounds that some people who stayed in the bush have. For example, they have some traits before even adding anything related to the rebels’ work. For example, your wife saw how rude you acted in response to an abducted person who was pleading for their lives, but you did not consider it. The women will see that the man’s future and all his relatives are in trouble given the deeds he had in the bush. They fear for the consequences of the spirits of the harmed. This prevents them from reuniting.83

Customarily in Acholi, the girl’s and boy’s family investigate the background of their child’s soon to be in-laws. Attention is paid to histories of witchcraft, hereditary illnesses, mental problems, and records of murder among others. If any of these things are found, the marriage may not proceed. If results of investigation are good, then marriage arrangements are made, enabled by the work of a go-between. Lawirwodi (The Paramount Chief) of Acholi described the customary courtship process that the LRA violated. I quote:

Their family would have also investigated the boy and that he is coming from a good family and is befitting to their daughter then eventually if it is alright when you send the official courier that you want to come and ask them to give you a date then the date is given and of course you would have had a go between somewhere that could be your auntie or your sister.84

Further, participants said that the way some LRA commanders behaved demonstrated violent characters that existed before the war. The sister to Langec’s forced husband told her that her brother had been beating women even before he was abducted. The man’s sister had come to convince Langec to reunite with her brother. But she opened up to Langec when she cited his violent behaviors towards women while in captivity that made her reject him. Relatives of the men pursued these women even if they had already rejected them, but many stood their grounds and rejected the pressures.

83 Key informant interview, LC One Chairman, Awach Sub County, Gulu district, October 29th, 2019.
84 Key informant interview with Lawirwodi of Acholi, Ker Kwaro Acholi, Gulu town, Oct 21st, 2019.
4.2.6 The men had more than one wife

Participants also stated that they rejected the men they were forced to be with because LRA commanders had more than one wife. One study reported that LRA commanders had an average of five wives, with the top leader believed to have more than forty wives (Carlson and Mazurana 2008). For example, Lagum’s husband had thirteen wives and Langec’s husband had eight while in captivity. In most cases, the men settled with one or two wives upon returning home. Polygamy still exists in Acholi to date but having five or ten wives is uncommon because of HIV-AIDS, the cost of living and multiple conflicts within the family. According to Erin Baines (2014; 2016), the LRA used the forced marriage policy in their desire to create a new and pure generation of Acholi. Therefore, having many wives was a strategy to fulfil this goal.

Participants also cited the LRA’s goals of creating a new Acholi as something that led to the birth of many children. They reported that commanders had so many wives that there was a timetable as to when each woman had a turn to stay the night with a commander. Similar findings have been previously published (See Amony 2015; Baines 2016; 2014; Cakaj 2016).

Even if some participants would have wished to continue these relationships, the men’s polygamous practice prevented them from going back. The responsibility of raising these children born to start a new Acholi was abandoned to women, especially if they rejected the men. How could a man keep up with his provision and protection role to thirteen wives and gain popularity for paying all their bride prices in Gulu town when there were no more raided goods to cater to the needs of women and children? It is impossible, and the women’s choices to reject them on this basis is significant. In Acholi, polygamy is sometimes embraced to provide labour in a man’s farm, yet often women hardly had any say over the utilization of harvests. My friends at a women’s rights organization in Gulu once told me that domestic violence and drunkenness was highly reported to their office during harvest seasons. Even if the men currently have fewer wives, control of proceeds from farming are still a source of conflicts. One participant told me

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85 Polygamy is an Acholi cultural practice where a man can marry more than one wife. Having many wives in the past was seen as a source of wealth because the man had to have a lot of cattle to pay dowry or bride price. But also, having many women meant more labour for the man’s agricultural productive capacity.
that her husband’s relatives came to get her from her parents so that she could help with farming. But their pleas were rejected. It is as though he wanted to continue using her labor the way he did while still in captivity. The experience of having many wives in captivity was harmful for most young girls because the older wives were so ruthless. The men managed the wives in the LRA, but they did so successfully because the war was happening. The conflicts between co-wives back home seems to be impossible for the women and men to handle, hence leading participants to end the relationships.

In sum, women narrated a range of factors that influenced their decisions to end these forced marriages with commanders. I did not discuss all of them in-depth, but a few others include: the men were ugly; some men became drunkards after returning home; the men already had wives before they were abducted and reunited with the wives they left home; and some participants rejected the relationship so as to experience total freedom from the men. Love with mercy could not thrive for women in this category. They hated the commanders. Despite all these issues that informed women’s decisions to end forced marriages, a few participants reunited but left for the same reasons presented above. However, a few reunited, formalized the marriages, and were still together by the time of the study for factors I discuss next.

4.3 ‘The Mother of a Rat Dies for Its Child’: Reunions

Participants often referred to an Acholi saying that goes: *min oyo opilo too pi latine* (the mother of a rat dies for its child). The rat called *opilo* does not ever cross a road. If it crosses, it must die. But the rat has moments when it crosses the road especially if its child is on the other side. It dies for the sake of its child the moment it crosses the road. Participants felt that this saying best describes their experiences with their children born in captivity in relation to their fathers. Results show that most participants who continued forced marriage with former LRA commanders made these decisions because of love on top of mercy, a concept this chapter develops. Love with mercy underpinned women’s decisions in relation to their children born in captivity, but also social, economic, and cultural factors that this sub section elaborates. These findings are similar to what has been reported with cases in Cambodia, Rwanda and Sierra Leone. For example, cultural norms against divorce or separation, financial difficulties, survival
needs (Toy-Cronin 2010; Jain 2008; Carlson and Mazurana 2008), the value for family relationships, children born of forced marriage, rejection and stigma (Christensen 2016; Jain 2008; Oosterveld 2011) were reasons for reunions. In Rwanda, Tutsi women continued staying with their husbands for survival because they had nowhere to go given their husbands had killed their families (Kalra 2001). I found only one study that discussed in detail the possibility of love developing as a result of these forced marriages in the context of northern Uganda (Dubal 2016) but my study discusses love and others factors informing their decision from an in-depth view point. Others briefly mentioned love, children and rejection as factors behind reunions (Apio 2016; Dubal 2016; Coulter 2009). My results are similar to what these authors found, but I build on this literature by elaborating how the love participants spoke about is a specific kind, love with mercy. The concept of love with mercy relates to having shared experiences, sympathy, senses of care by the commanders and children born of these marriages. I incorporate women’s voices to deepen our understanding on why they decide to continue forced marriages.

4.3.1 Children

Except Langee and two others, most participants returned with one to four children fathered by commanders. Most commanders who returned home abandoned the children, have been denied access and continuity of relations with their children by maternal relatives, or are unable to give child support. Many participants left their husbands in the bush with unknown fates. Women face challenges paying school fees for their children. They struggle to get them through primary, and in a few cases, secondary education, but often are unable to get them to college or vocational training institutes as it is unaffordable in Uganda. Participants also lack land to live with these children as most women are unaware of the paternal clans of identity of their children. According to Acholi traditions, children’s identities are defined by their paternal clans of origin. Children belong to their father’s clans. A clan in Acholi involves a combination of families headed by males at every level of the society. But for the participants’ children, these identities are

While these studies noted these factors, my study builds on these through highlighting women’s lived and in-depth narratives regarding decision making. This is the first study that primarily focuses on decision making post forced marriage and sexual violence.
unknown because the commanders hid their real names or homes of origin from the women for fear of consequences of their actions after the war. The situation is worse for women whose husbands died before they returned home, for it may be even less likely that they learn the truth of their identity. Although a research found that men attempted to pass on their identity through various means, such as naming the children after their relatives, writing letters or telling other commanders their identities (Aijazi and Baines 2017).

Mothers who reunited with their forced husbands did so for the sake of their children. The women love their children, with mercy towards their fathers. Even if they made decisions based on a couple of other factors that I discuss, children were the primary reasons. Even though the women knew “crossing the road” was risky just as “mother rat” does, they took the risks. They decided to “die” for the sake of their children if going back to the men meant “death.” These were hard decisions mothers made because their children were rejected by relatives and communities in many cases. With or without love, mothers were afraid of abandonment and risked living with the fathers of their children. For example, Lagum remarked: ‘I had made up my mind to stay with the father of my children whether I loved him or not because I believed he would not abandon me in any way since we already have children.’ 87 Similarly, ‘I continued staying with my husband because I came back with two children that I had with him from captivity and there was no where I could take the children.’ 88

Further, participants reported that the men they married or begun cohabiting with after returning home did not want these children to live with them. Mothers decided to live as single parents because they could neither continue with the fathers of their children, nor keep a new relationship with a man and his extended family who would never accept the children. The children were always the women’s priorities when it came to decision making. In-fact, this is an example of a child-centered approach to reintegration post violence. Mothers of children born in captivity had their children’s best interests at heart. They mercifully forgave the commanders and reunited with them for the love they have for their children. Where women decided to have new

87 Oral history interviews, Gulu town, October 17th, 2019.
88 Focus group discussion, Awach Sub County, Gulu district, September 13th, 2019.
relationships, these children often lived with their maternal grandparents, not in her marital home as most new partners did not accept the burden of raising “another man’s child.” Many new relationships ended because of this view of their children. In other cases, female children born in captivity were at risk of being sexually abused as Lagum reported:

Another reason [I reunited] was for my children because sometimes in the communities the teenage girls especially those from captivity were being sexually abused by men. If you remarry, a man will love you but not your children. That is why they sexually abuse and you as a mother [you] should not say a word about it. If you react, they will tell you that 'why didn’t Kony spare you.'

By asking “why didn’t Kony spare you,” men who sexually abuse children fathered by commanders and their supporters negatively think it is okay since the mothers of these children were also victims of similar abuses. In the words of another mother:

I had made up my mind to reunite with my husband because I could not go to another man when the father of my children was still alive. Women from captivity like me have young daughters and when you go with them to other men, they may turn your daughters into their wives. I only came back with young daughters, so it is very difficult to change husbands. I made up my mind and went back to live together with my husband and all was good.

Another reason women cited reunion instead of new marriages, is that participants didn’t want children to have different fathers. In Acholi, having children with different fathers meant having several clans of identity in your home. For example, Lakatalatwe returned with children fathered by two LRA men and was reluctant to have more children fathered by a new man post abduction. But her reunion with the commander failed given he remained violent. At the time of this interview, she was pregnant with a third man’s child. Most women gave birth to more children at home with new partners except for those who reunited like Lagum and Laber. It is perceived that the men are supposed to oversee the household because of their gender and Acholi culture. For example, men are expected to be family heads, owners of property and to exhibit toughness over

89 Oral history interview, Gulu town, October 17th, 2019.
90 Focus group discussions, Gulu town, August 23rd, 2019.
submission. So, with these cultural meanings, participants who reunited reasoned that it was better to stick with the men they had or end up with many clans in a woman-headed household, as one woman elaborated:

Truthfully, you find that men are all the same. The ones from the bush are the same as the ones that are found at home. You may feel that you do not want to have ten different fathers to your children and decide to go back to live with him so that when you decide to produce more children, they will all have the same father.91

From a gender lens, the above statement pointing that “men are all the same,” demonstrates that the patriarchal system functions at the disadvantage of women and the advantage of men. This system exists beyond war and culture and continues to perpetuate violence against women and girls. Whether or not a woman leaves a forced commander husband and gets another man, certain conditions of power and privileges remain unturned. For example, children will always belong to their father’s clans in Acholi with or without war.

Another factor related to children that informed the women’s decision to continue forced marriage was the need to access land that I discuss as a place-based justice in the next chapter. Lack of land, and a place to live with children born in captivity made women continue forced marriages even if they may not have wanted to. This lack of choice to end the relationship given the children need land to live allows coercive relationships to continue post abduction.

Further, children who grow up in maternal homes in Acholi are stigmatized, lack decision making powers and are sidelined from utilization of maternal lands. Two participants decided to remarry the brothers of their husbands so that their children from captivity access land. To add, land wrangles is a problem that the Acholi people are grappling with, and the impact is worse for the children of these women as their father’s land remain inaccessible and/or unknown in most cases. As one woman narrates:

91 Wang oo, Gulu town, October 11th, 2019.
When we returned home from captivity, he [husband] found land wrangles going on. The issue of land is so difficult that even if we go to our maternal homes, the people in our homes do not want the children that we came with from captivity. So, a mother would feel that the father of the children is back from captivity, and he may have land at their paternal home for the children to live. This makes you decide that you will not take the children to another clan but to their father’s clan, and that makes you go back to him.²

4.3.2  Love

I explain three elements of love that led some women to continue with the fathers of their children born in captivity. These are love with mercy, love with sympathy and care, and protection by the men while in captivity. Love is used as a theoretical concept in this dissertation, and less as an emotional feeling of falling in love. Love in this sense is an experience-based notion that demonstrates an ethical dimension of relationships. An experience that involves pain and forgiveness.

4.3.2.1  Love With Mercy

Laber, the woman I quoted at the start of this chapter narrated how love with mercy is not love at first sight. It is love founded on mercy and forgiveness. But some men were too brutal as the story of Langec shows to the point that love could hardly develop. Instead, to use Erin Baines’ (2016, 134) quotation of the words women used to explain their experience of forced marriage, ‘they buried the anger in their hearts.’ If love could develop, it would have to intersect with other factors like the birth of children or lack of other life alternatives upon escaping captivity. It is a conditional love that thrives on mercy, forgiveness, and reconciliation between the couple. Laber and many others forgave and felt mercy towards the men as they were also abducted and forced to be in captivity. Women like Laber acknowledge that these relationships started in unacceptable ways, with force, but also that love developed over time. This finding advances what Samuel Dubal (2016) found in his work with similar women in northern Uganda. Besides love developing as Dubal reported, my results add a new perspective that it is beyond the lay

² Wang oo, Gulu town, October 11th, 2019
understanding of love, it is with mercy and forgiveness. It is love that started in a war zone and involved a process of forgiveness and mercy to the fathers of their children before transforming to happiness as Laber described. The mention of love as a reason for reunion was the same for participants in both urban (Laber) and rural areas. Below, I quote two participants Lakica and Aloyo from a rural setting who agreed with Laber:

Living together goes hand in hand with love. Living together without love is [not] possible if the love of the man is shared by many women. I am living with my husband. He loves me and I love him too.

He already wasted my time. I also love him, and he loves me too. There is nothing that will separate us. We are already old and if I leave him, he will only suffer and that’s all I think of. His first wife is not taking care of him so I also see how I wasted his time, and he also wasted my time when I was still young and could have gone with a young man to take care of me, but that opportunity is gone. So, we are taking care of ourselves, and we love each other...I made up my mind that am going nowhere and we shall take care of each other till death do us part.

Aloyo, embodies and remains emotionally connected to her experience of abduction in her continuation to love and live with the man whom she says already wasted her time. If Aloyo was not abducted, and forced to be a wife of a commander, she would have made good use of her time in education and built foundations for a better future. Aloyo also talks of love as a strong feeling that is keeping them together despite the time already lost in abduction. Out of merciful love, Aloyo feels that her aging husband would only suffer if she left him. It is merciful love that Aloyo draws on to live her live post abduction. To explore further actions like Aloyo’s, I quote Kamari Clarke who writes, ‘justice is seen as being produced and challenged by the materiality of people’s actions. Through which meanings of justice are lived’ (2019, 4). Relationship-based justice is a theme this thesis develops, as I turn to in Chapter Seven. Participants called for acceptance, love, and acknowledgment of pain from their families, husbands, children, communities, and government. Aloyo’s act of continuing to love her aging husband illustrates

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93 Forgiveness is rooted in Acholi cultural values associated with conflict resolution.
94 Focus group discussions, Awach Sub County, Gulu district, September 13th, 2019.
95 Focus group discussions, Awach Sub County, Gulu district, September 13th, 2019.
what Clarke called “materiality” that challenges dominant frames of justice. She is experiencing senses of justice that materializes in the everyday relationships—such as with her husband.

### 4.3.2.2 Care and protection

Besides mercy, women reported that they reunited with men because they were caring and protected them while in captivity. ‘He took care of me’ was what participants often said. However, the rebel commanders had a responsibility to take care of their women. It is this responsibility that came with being given a wife that made some young men reluctant to have wives as the women said the men were also forced. But this responsibility to care for a wife gave grounds for love to emerge. Having been presented with the options of either life or death, women chose life. But this life would not have stood the test of time if the men did not live up to the responsibility the LRA chief of command gave, to care for these women. Accepting the men became a survival strategy for remaining alive and returning home without anticipation that love may show up. Instead, this sense of care by the men who were seen as parents by some participants, and a survival strategy, led to love overtime and led women to decide to continue these relationships. For example, Lamunu and Aleng respectively told me:

> It’s also not easy to stay in captivity without a man because you would not eat food. It’s the man that gets something for you to cook, and you eat together. It’s very difficult for a woman to be moving with the convoy to look for food, return and cook. We could sleep hungry sometimes...The men were like our mothers and fathers because they took all the responsibility of taking care of us. A woman without a man could have bigger problems. But if one had a man, then life could be easy because he would provide food and give advice.

> He took good care of me from captivity. I lived well and he did everything for me. …..When I could not walk, he paved way in the bushes for me to follow him because I could not handle paving way through thick forests and grasses......Also, when I gave birth, he walked in the rain to fetch water for me despite the injuries he had.

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96 Caring for a wife in the LRA included providing food, clothing and other needs like soap, lotions and beddings. It also involved a man being accountable to the LRA Chief on his wives’ wellbeing, ensuring safe deliveries of babies, protecting them during battles, and building makeshift huts in newly established camps among others.

97 Focus group discussion, Awach Sub County, Gulu district, September 13th, 2019.

Key informants agreed with the women’s decision to reunite based on the sense of care the men had in captivity. For example, the Local Councilor One in Awach says, ‘others forcefully abducted the woman but lived a good life with them to the point that they were much better than some men who weren’t in the bush. For a woman, she might feel that he just forced her but also realizes that he took good care of her when in the bush and perhaps that is the person God has prepared for her. She then introduces him to the family, and some are currently married.’

Similarly, the District Chairperson of Gulu notes: ‘commanders had the responsibility to take care of their wives and there was a sense of safeness that the women felt.’ As I discussed earlier, reports indicate that warring parties forcefully abduct women for procreation, labor and rape (Apio 2016; Boesten 2007; O’Brien 2016). Yet, even when women like Aleng and Lamunu fell in love with their husbands due to their senses of care and protection in captivity, the rebels still emerge victorious in their original intention to objectify women as laborers and sex providers, something that continues to happen after war ends. I argue that commander’s care for women is propagated towards their own selfish gains from the war.

### 4.3.3 Shared experiences

Something related to sympathy that led women to reunite with their forced husbands was shared experiences. Women reasoned that they were both abducted. This shared experience meant that they understand each other and would have less conflicts, they argued. Additionally, women said it was better to stick together and face the same reintegration challenges as formerly abducted persons. Going through similar experiences create strong bonds among people. Throughout my work with formerly abducted persons in northern Uganda, I observed that their relationships with fellow abductees are tightly knit and much stronger than with non-abducted persons. There is an Acholi saying, *remo pek loyo pii* (blood is thicker than water). I facilitated a group session with abducted women in a workshop organized by the Conjugal Slavery in War Partnership in Kampala-Uganda, organized by York University and the University of British Columbia, May 15-19, 2017.
Uganda in 2017 where I heard women disagree with this saying. They stated that they feel more connected with people who share their experiences than their own blood relatives.

In the words of one woman, ‘the thing that pushed me to go back [to my husband] is because we went through similar hardships. We share the same stories that are understandable by us, and our way of life is different from that of the people who lived out here at home. The anger inside me is handled and understood by the one who lived with me in captivity.’ She raised a component of the need for partners to understand each other and be accommodative for a relationship to last. A person who has similar experiences like you would understand you better as they know what it feels to go through an experience like abduction. Similarly, Nyapolo, who had already left the man by the time of the research, shared what made her initially give the relationship a chance.

She said, ‘the men out here don’t understand us and think former captives are demon possessed. So, whenever we get angry or annoyed, they say it’s the demon inside us. Even just having a frowned face causes a lot of unkind words to come out against us. So, I decided to go back to my husband.’ Similarly, Larem who is currently married to her husband notes:

What made me go back to live with him is because we were both former LRA captives and no abuses would come up. So, we are living together harmoniously but the only problem right now is that he is disabled because he lost one leg during a battle in captivity. Life is not easy for him because for someone to work well, they need both legs. When you do not have both legs to stand, then you must only survive by doing what you do best with your hands.

4.3.4 Sympathy

You just sympathize, forgive, and say, let me just stay with this person. So that love is sympathy, it is a forgiving love. When you are forced to go and stay with someone, so many things happen thereafter. For instance, a child was born as a result. That child was only born out of kica (mercy). It would not be possible without kica. Our first born also came out due to the mercy and sympathy we both had. It would not have been possible

102 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 31st, 2019.
103 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 23rd, 2019
104 Oral history interview, Gulu town, September 10th, 2019
without that sympathy. Sometimes you are forced to be with a person and later you find yourself having children with the man.\textsuperscript{105}

These commanders were either innately violent or took advantage of being commanders with the power of the guns to wield abuses to the girls and women. The same human capacity for violence that the commanders had, was met with an extraordinary human capacity for peace-summed up in the names of love, care, and sympathy as Laber’s quote above shows. The birth of her children was possible due to mercy. I quote Lagum who speaks of sympathy:

The father of my children had thirteen wives, so even if he is doing something hurting to you, you may take it that he is a rebel-minded person. But the life was not easy at all because whatever you do was an order from him. Sometimes you may feel hurt but at times you just take it as a way of living with the LRA.....The most painful experience I encountered with him from there that I cannot even let my children know because they may hate their father, was during a time when the Aboke girls were abducted. One of the girls was entrusted to our care and was staying in our house. This girl escaped and my husband was very angry because they [LRA] loved girls who went through schools.\textsuperscript{106} At that point he wished I was the one who escaped, not that girl. Then he ordered his soldiers to torture me. I was beaten to the extent that I could not move or even turn my body or walk. Even dressing was a problem. I developed a problem in my chest that am still suffering up to now from that beating...He has never apologized. But I also take it as a normal thing that can happen to anybody, though it hurts. I decided to let go.\textsuperscript{107}

Lagum, who was abducted at twelve years old and has six children with her husband, raises an important element of apology expanded in Chapter Seven. Despite sympathetically accepting these men with all their brutalities, they have not acknowledged their wrong towards the women. Lagum’s husband has never apologized to her and has not met her parents.\textsuperscript{108} Her husband re-enlisted in Ugandan army, just like other former LRA commanders. With his monthly salary, he is not helping Lagum care for their children. Lagum, and other participants treated the men with sympathy even if he wasn’t the one who directly abducted them. The sympathy is based on the

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\textsuperscript{105} Oral history interview, Gulu town, September 11\textsuperscript{th}, 2019
\textsuperscript{106} The LRA had preference for girls who were abducted from secondary schools because they knew how to read and write English. These girls were tasked to teach children at some point, but it wasn’t sustainable.
\textsuperscript{107} Oral history interview, Gulu town, October 17\textsuperscript{th}, 2019.
\textsuperscript{108} A man’s visit to a woman’s home in Acholi is a significant first step in initiating a formal marriage. It demonstrates his respect for his in-laws and his seriousness in their daughter.
\end{flushright}
view that the men acted on orders on whatever wrong they did. As much as the LRA abducted girls and gave them to the men, some participants reported that the men took it upon themselves to either treat them nicely or violently. Men like Lagum’s husband benefited from her sympathy, merciful love, and continuation of the relationship:

While deciding on whether to continue with the father of my children, I realized that my husband had no mother…. But also, people who were staying around their home as neighbors gave me all sorts of advice. Others told me that I shouldn’t go back to live with him because he is a bad person, he is jealous, a killer and all sorts of bad things they could say. But to me I had already decided that I wanted to continue living with him since I never saw any brutal act like killing or torturing anybody willingly. He would only follow orders from his superiors….. Up to now, people still talk about me staying with an old man, but I decided, and I do not care whatever people say since I am the one who knows him better.109

4.3.5 Rejection and hopelessness

I had the desire to go back to my mother’s home if my family didn’t tell me to find my way elsewhere. But I did not have anywhere to go. The good part was that my husband clearly stated that he could not leave me in times of hardships. That is why I accepted to go with him.110

Results show that rejection and feelings of hopelessness influenced women’s decision to reunite with their husbands as Nimaro stated above. Having been abducted by the rebels and stayed away from home for a long-time, many children who return home risk being rejected by their relatives on assumptions that they have rebel mindsets, may have been possessed by evil and vengeful spirits, and return with unwanted children fathered by the rebels to a poor community among others. Participants like Nimaro did not embody the concept of love with mercy but continued forced marriages because they were rejected by relatives and communities. Nimaro would not have gone back to her forced husband if she had a place to go. Once a person is rejected by people in their surroundings, they develop feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. Rejection of participants by their relatives and communities illustrates why women disagreed

110 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 23rd, 2019
with the Acholi saying that ‘blood is thicker than water.’ They could not believe that their own
blood, their mothers, and fathers could outrightly reject and abandon them and their children at a
time when they needed most help. What was more painful to participants was their own parents
could not acknowledge their failures in protecting them from being abducted. As noted in
Chapter Two, these women returned to an impoverished community dealing with consequences
of a war the fathers of their children fought. Having been rejected, they had nowhere to go. For
example, Nyaparwot and Anyadwe narrated:

When I got home with my two children, seeing how things were, I wondered where I
would start. What will I do? How? I found it difficult to start life. Unkind words started
coming from people mainly because of the items we were given when we came back
from GUSCO [reception center]. They started saying [that] we finished people and now
we were being given free rice, posho, and mattresses. That long before, we were killing
people and didn’t care, and now we talk on radio without shame, yet we killed our fellow
Acholi people. And the government welcomed us warmly with its ten fingers, we are
getting free food and other items.....I was so heartbroken and hurt for a week without
eating food. Later, my uncle’s wife started saying we were given money when we were
leaving GUSCO, and if she were the president [of Uganda], she could call all the
returnees, put them in a truck and throw them into the Karuma falls.111

When I was still in GUSCO, I went and talked over radio four or five times. It took a
while because they [relatives] thought I was no longer alive. So, my sister and dad came.
My mum had since died. My real dad told me himself that he sees that I have children
and he cannot take me home. That I should go back and join the government army and
continuing combat work, take the children to the government to care of because there was
no space [land].112

The rejection that participants met upon returning home were connected to the fact that they had
been presumed dead but returned unexpected. The long period of time the Acholi people lived in
displacement camps affected the community’s social fabric and value of relationships.
Compounded by one being abducted, the gaps between an internally displaced person and a
formerly abducted person deepens. Participants reported that they had been forgotten by their
family members while in other cases, last funeral rites were conducted for them. These were
painful for participants to talk about as many cried. For women like Lagum, her father was killed

111 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 23rd, 2019
112 Focus group discussions, Gulu town, August 31st, 2019
by the rebels her husband fought for. She lives with a chest disability caused by a beating ordered by her own husband, yet she had to continue with him because her mother rejected her and her children. Despite being rejected by her mother, Lagum forgave her and currently gives her financial support. She narrates:

Even my own mother…. looked at me as someone they had forgotten about…..My mother appeared after five years since she last saw me from World Vision [reception center]. She owned a restaurant in Kalongo and had money. It was hurting that my own mother rejected me. I didn’t care so much. I had to let go and welcome her again. My mother had remarried, and she was living with her husband, but the husband told her that if she agreed that I go stay with them then they will have to separate because he feared and believed that my children and I could be having the minds of the rebels as I took long in captivity. So, I told her that it was okay as I didn’t want to be the one to end her marriage. I will take care of my children whether they study or not. ……..But I was really hurt for the way she treated me before and being a Born-Again Christian, I had to forgive her….. She is still my mother; I could not neglect her. And I never blamed her for not taking me in due to my condition. With the fear the LRA had already inflicted on people, it was hard to accept returnees. So, I welcomed her back into my life.113

Lagum’s rejection was particularly painful because it happened at a time when some of her colleagues were warmly welcomed by their relatives. Given the strong bonds abducted persons have, they share such stories in groups. When children return from abduction, either they undergo a cleansing or prayer ceremony organized by the cultural institution, and/or at the family level when the rehabilitation centers reunite them with their families. These were moments when the Acholi traditional justice ceremonies that I discussed in Chapter Two were important for the reintegration of abducted persons. Lagum describes her feelings of hopelessness as follows: ‘I had no one. So, whatever I do, I always do it knowing that I have no one, but my children…. Even the prayers that people would gather and pray for my fellow returnees, no one prayed for me, not even the traditional way of stepping over an egg to welcome somebody who has stayed away from home. It was not done for me and my children. It was as if they had forgotten about me totally. You will only hear how people are being prayed for, and how their parents are frequently visiting them. This was so painful to me.’114

113 Oral history interview, Gulu town, October 17th, 2019
114 Oral history interview, Gulu town, October 17th, 2019
Further, I observed that in Acholi, one of the worst kinds of rejection is from a mother. Mothers and fathers are so significant when it comes to parenting. Mothers are closer to their daughters than their fathers on matters of childbirth. They are the first people to rush to a delivery unit in a hospital when their daughters are having babies. For the women in this study, first, their fathers, mothers, community leaders and government couldn’t stop their abduction. Secondly, as little girls, they couldn’t have their mothers with them to see them through childbirth when they were children themselves. And worst of all, having survived all that and returned home, a place they often longed for while in captivity, their mothers rejected them. War made mothers turn against daughters in a culture where relationships between these two are highly valued. A mother is the first teacher of her daughter in Acholi. If a woman has challenges in her marriage, she is told to go back to their home so that her mother may teach her good values about motherhood and marriage. But Lagum was not alone. Lakalatwe reunited because her father had been killed by the rebels and her mother, rejected her. I quote:

When I came back my mother first welcomed me, but she changed her minds towards me afterwards. She told me to live my life away from her and said I was demon possessed. I told her, ‘where were you when I got abducted and why couldn’t you stop the rebels from taking me?’ Because, if she did that, then I would not be having demons. I had chicken in the village and every time I went to pick them to sell to raise school fees for my children, my mother refused me from taking the chicken. When I insisted, she started abusing me that I am demon possessed and I should die my own kind of death with my children. She told me that I did not bring anything good to her home and even my husband did not take anything for her.115

4.3.6 Stigma

Stigma participants and their children experience in communities they returned to influenced women’s decisions to reunite with commanders. Nearly all participants experienced and continue to suffer stigma from their families, communities, and social circles. They are called names like mon pa adwii (rebel wives), mon pa Kony (Kony’s wives), dwog cen paco (those who returned

115 Oral history interviews, Gulu town, September 11th, 2019
home), *olum olum* (bush people), *jo pa Kony* (Kony’s people), *luneko* (killers) and many others. Their children are called names like *lotino pa Kony* (Kony’s children), and *lotino pa adwii* (children of rebels) among others. Some of their children however grew up without knowing that they were born in captivity as their mothers returned when they were still very young. Confronted with these names, children who didn’t know about their birth places questioned their mothers about their fathers’ whereabouts. And for those whose fathers are known and returned home, reuniting was a considerable option.

The stigma participants faced were sometimes connected to the perception that they supported the LRA war by cooking and being wives to rebels. Besides, most people who returned from captivity are perceived as perpetrators and that they have evil vengeful spirits called *cen* in Acholi or mental illnesses. This was one of the bases, Anyadwe’s father used to reject her. ‘He said that there is a perception that people who returned from there [the bush] have mental issues so that is why he cannot care for them [children],’ says Anyadwe.116 As I discussed in Chapter Two, cleansing ceremonies that women like Lagum didn’t have opportunities to go through, are believed to address the issues associated with *cen* or mental illnesses. Whether or not the Acholi cleansing ceremonies, prayers or counselling services were performed, the women and their children still experienced stigma and blame for supporting the war, thereby pushing them to go back to men they wouldn’t have, under normal circumstances.

Furthermore, stigma makes formerly abducted persons feel a much stronger bond with each other than with non-abducted ones. This bond enabled love with mercy to thrive with fathers of the women’s children given their shared experiences of stigma. Whether in town or rural areas, participants still faced stigma if people learn who they are. Others lived peacefully if no one knew they were abducted. As I mentioned in the chapter’s introduction, Laber left Pabbo IDP camp due to stigma and blame for the war to reunite with her husband in Gulu town, but still experiences stigma together with her husband. Laber illustrates:

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116 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 31st, 2019
Seven people were killed by the LRA. Later, they started saying I came back home with a gun at the time I escaped from captivity. They said it was the reason people were killed in Pawel [in Pabbo]. From that moment, life became hard for me, and hostile words were uttered at me, yet I had not even stayed there [in Pabbo] for long…….In town also, it is not easy when people get to know that you and your husband are both former captives. Sometimes, you just have to swallow their mean, abusive words as though you are drinking water. They finger point our home from a distance saying, that is the rebels’ home. For example, they say my husband and I are soldiers. I don’t understand where and when I held a gun from out here.  

4.3.7 Poverty and survival

The study revealed that despite all the above factors leading to reunions, foremost was poverty. In fact, many stated that if it were not for poverty, they would choose to live separately from their children’s father. It is like a second layer of captivity, except this time round, it is a captivity from home. Freedom that the women longed for while still in captivity is both present and absent in some of these relationships. Poverty robbed many participants of their choices to freely exit these relationships permanently. Some women said they accepted the men in captivity to survive. But the same goal informed their decisions after exiting rebellion. They are free because they left captivity, but they are not also very free because they are still trapped with the same men who forced them to be wives.

Having been denied education opportunities through abduction and sexual violence, the women lack employable skills to get stable jobs that could bring income to their households. Participants and their children lack school fees. They are unable to afford housing, lack land, medical care, and many other basic needs because of poverty. This lack of basic needs underpins women’s perception of access to these things as justice presented in the coming chapters. This finding corroborates with perspectives from key informants who also indicated that the women reunited because of poverty and survival needs. Women could not just start life on their own with their children with the abject poverty they faced. It is poverty that led to their rejection as they were

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117 Initial workshop with women, Gulu town, August 20th, 2019.
often viewed as burdens by their own families. Lagum and Nimaro could have been accepted by their families if the situation was not worsened by poverty in Acholi.

Finally, women who continued these relationships did so for a variety of reasons, but I only discussed in detail the ones that repeatedly came up like rejection, stigma, love with mercy and forgiveness, empathy, shared experiences, poverty, and children born in captivity among others. Other factors mentioned for reuniting with the men include: the men were considered young and age appropriate and the men can help pay school fees for the children. Key informants highlighted similar factors discussed and added that in some situations, reunions were a means for protecting the children the women returned with. I conclude the chapter with a few thoughts in the next section.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter explored the rationales behind women’s decision making to end or continue forced marriages. They shared with me the concept of “love with mercy,” a kind of love that takes the shape of their sympathy for the men based on shared experiences of abduction and hardship, and the children they have together. In my interpretation, however, their children were the primary reasons for reunions. I argue that women invoked the virtues of motherhood by putting their bodies at the frontlines for the sake of their children. In Acholi, married women are often advised to kany (endure) or bedi (stay or continue) pi lotino (for the children). I use the metaphor “frontlines” to depict the nature of endurance women go through in continuing these forced marriages. Further, participants are still faced with husbands who remained violent despite leaving the rebel group. In such cases, women’s homes still mimic “frontlines.” Women do this for the love of their children, and for the mercy towards the commanders.

Love on top of mercy is rooted in the bonds created through having shared experiences with commanders while still in rebel abduction. Enduring the harshness of rebel life together with commanders gave room for this kind of love to thrive. Women mercifully forgave the commanders and accepted them because of shared experience of being abducted. However, other
participants didn’t embody the concept of love with mercy and continued forced marriages because they were rejected by relatives and communities.

Participants who did not reunite like Langec, sighted lack of consent, torture, hate, and the fact that the men were too old to be their husbands. In a few cases, participants cited consent as the only reason to not reunite, but most times, it was consent in combination with two or more factors the chapter discussed. The study concludes that most women leave these forced marriages when they return home because not many went through the processual ‘love with mercy’ that their counterparts like Laber did. They refused to continue putting their bodies on the frontlines by enduring a continuing presence of a torturer and abusive commander despite the cultural pressure of endurance (kanyo). They reclaimed the freedom that was ripped from them upon being given as wives to commanders.

Lastly, I argue that if women’s senses of justice are met, their decisions to stay or leave these relationships will likely be different given desperation, rejection, poverty, and lack of land forced many to reunite. But also, we need not completely disregard the view that love developed overtime for women like Laber and Aleng. A processual kind of love that involved forgiving commanders for harms they caused. Challenges that force women to reunite with men who tortured them can be addressed by enabling lived justice, a sense of justice that lets women and their children live descent lives through availability of land (place-based justice), compensation, needs-based justice, and relationship-based forms of justice. I discuss these in the next three chapters.
Chapter 5: ‘Land That We Call Our Own’: Place-Based Justice

5.1 Introduction

In 1995, the Lord’s Resistance Army rebels (LRA) abducted Larem when she was only twelve years old. She was held in captivity for ten years before escaping and returning home. Both of her parents had died before her abduction. Upon returning, Larem learned that her grandmother who used to take care of her had also died, and she had nowhere to go. Larem returned with three children born in captivity, and currently has five children fathered by the same former LRA commander. Unlike other participants, Larem reported having courtship with the father of her children after living at another commander’s home as a ting ting.\textsuperscript{118} She continued her relationship with this man post abduction and has been traditionally married in an Acholi wedding ceremony called nyom, a process that can only proceed with the payment of bride price.

Larem’s husband, however, returned home with a permanent disability he sustained while serving the LRA.\textsuperscript{119} He lost one leg. Having spent fifteen years at home since returning from abduction in 2005, Larem has not received justice for what she endured during the war. She currently makes paper beads and works in people’s gardens near Gulu town to earn a living. Unfortunately, her beads have limited market. She carried some along to our interview that I bought and brought to Canada as gifts. Her husband repairs shoes and makes paper beads but they are both struggling to earn a living and raise their children.

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\textsuperscript{118} Ting ting was a name used by commanders to refer to prepubescent girls who served at their homes as babysitters, porters and in many cases, turned wives. While most women were primarily forced to become wives, Larem engaged in courtship with her current husband when they both worked under the leadership of another LRA commander.

\textsuperscript{119} Sustaining such an injury makes life difficult for those returning from abduction. For example, they face stigma on top of the physical limitations they have. For more details, see Hollander, Theo, and Bani Gill. "Every day the war continues in my body: Examining the marked body in post conflict Northern Uganda." International Journal of Transitional Justice 8.2 (2014): 217-234.
Since Larem courted her husband, one might think all should be well, but it isn’t. As discussed in Chapter Four, determining consent in a war zone is difficult, and Larem was too young to genuinely have courtship and consent to a sexual relationship. The fact that she was abducted alone makes the courtship questionable. Larem currently faces many challenges resulting from her abduction. She is unable to afford housing, education, and land. Her husband has also been denied access to his family’s land as he was not considered having authority due to his long absence from home, leaving Larem landless. According to Larem, her husband is not always consulted or informed of significant family matters like land transactions. When asked what her senses of justice were, she had this to say:

If someone could buy for me a piece of land even without putting a building for me, I would put the structures myself because I am renting, and I do not have anywhere to stay and call my home. When you are in your own home, the money you would use for renting could be used for doing some other productive things for the family. All I keep praying for is to have my own place, a place I call home. When that happens then I would have happiness and peace.\(^{120}\)

Results show that lack of places or land to call home is one of the biggest challenges women like Larem face. In this chapter, I use place to mean physical space, geographical location, an area, or land to live and belong.\(^{121}\) Three of sixty-one participants mentioned that at one point following their return, they regretted returning due to the difficulties of reintegration they faced. Larem narrates:

I had a lot of worries that I returned, and my grandmother was not there…..I felt that my return from abduction was meaningless and I should have stayed in captivity. So, changing my mind was very difficult from World Vision [reception center] where I was. People were changing after returning from captivity, but I was not. I would serve food and just look at it without eating. I used to just look on as people played sports.\(^{122}\)

Justice - according to study participants - includes accessibility and ownership of land. Land is important to the women because it provides a place to belong and call home. Having land was

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\(^{120}\) Oral history interview, Gulu town, September 10th, 2019.

\(^{121}\) Kabedo is an Acholi word for a place or physical space to stay or live.

\(^{122}\) Oral history interview, Gulu town, September 10th, 2019.
mentioned repeatedly as justice by most participants. As discussed in Chapter Two, land wrangles peaked after the war in northern Uganda. While wrangles are now declining, former captive “wives” and their children suffer most because they are at the periphery of Acholi society. Land has been heavily commercialized in Acholi as the poor often sold it for quick cash instead of sharing with relatives in need. In rural areas, most land is being rented to those who want to utilize it. But whether for sale or rent, women in the study cannot afford it.

This chapter argues that justice is place-based informed by women’s articulation that land is home, land is livelihood, land is identity and belonging, and land is healing. These articulations are shaped by customary marriage practices, and practices of wife inheritance. Further, home is also defined as a place in which one’s ancestors flourish and one’s relations are strengthened. Yet this remains challenging not only because women are discriminated against within patriarchal systems, but because of the impacts of the war that brought about their rejection, and land wrangles related to land inheritance and poverty. These customary practices around marriage and land informed how home came to be defined in terms of women and children’s identities and senses of belonging. Senses of justice connected to land are illustrative of justice as a lived concept, an overarching argument this thesis develops. To contextualize these results, I first discuss women, land, and marriage in Acholi in the next section. I will then turn to a section on land as a place-based sense of justice connected to identity, belonging, home, livelihood, and healing. This section is followed by another on land and spirituality that demonstrates land relations of Acholi people with their ancestors. The chapter concludes with a discussion of findings.

5.2 Women, Land and Marriage in Acholi

Acholi people are generally subsistence farmers, but the war left them with nothing except land as their major source of livelihood (Hopwood 2015; Whyte and Acio 2017). Ninety percent of land in Uganda is held in customary title (Hopwood 2015) including Acholi. Historically, there

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123 The war effected how land was managed in Acholi. Poverty, a major impact of the war led to increase commercialization of land that would normally be given to relatives, friends, and neighbours for free.
were areas in Acholi that were gazetted for animal grazing, hunting grounds, and was communally owned. Land was given as gifts to people who eventually owned it if they were peaceful and didn’t cause any troubles to the host clan. This has changed today because most gazetted hunting grounds have been claimed by individuals, and gifting land no longer occurs. Some land conflicts are associated with attempts to kick out people who had been gifted land by great grandparents (Hopwood 2017) and elders who knew land boundaries have since died in the war. In this section, I discuss how women get access to land in Acholi, and wife inheritance as it relates to land.

5.2.1 Women’s Access to Land in Acholi

In Acholi, women access land either through marriage or from their paternal clans. Customarily, a woman who never marries, or marries and returns home due to divorce, separation, or her husband’s death, is entitled to her father’s land. Further, a married woman also has access to land through her husband’s family because she is considered a full member of the family by virtue of marriage. And this is materialized by a woman’s ability to give birth to more children in that clan offering her more security (Lenhart and Whyte 2016). But these two land avenues are not always available, as this chapter elaborates. For example, war’s displacement as discussed in Chapter Two, disrupted these practices. Participants struggled to access land post displacement and abduction. Yet a study argued that women have relatively better access to formally tenured land compared to what is publicized (Hopwood 2015). Women have the same rights as men to buy, sell and own land though other inequalities mean they seldom do, the report noted. Hopwood (2015, 391) further argued that ‘hybrid local authorities in Acholi are supportive of kinship and marriage claims to land made by women.’ But the experiences of participants and their demand for land as justice departed from this argument because despite existing support from local authorities, women’s limited access to land is compounded by other inequalities like poverty, limited education, and abduction. For example, Evelyn Amony narrates why land, despite its inaccessibility, is so important to participants:

Land is important because in Acholi culture a woman gets land from the place she was married at. When you [are] a caroma a like me, when you have already given birth to three or more children in another clan….Like me, I gave birth to three children in another
clan and am now in Angaya clan, but they do not consider me as very important like a young lady [who is] newly brought to that home. They [clan] would marry her before me because I came there when I already had three children elsewhere not equal to a lady who is going to start giving birth for the first time in her life in that clan.\textsuperscript{124}

\textit{Caromaa, ogek, and gekere} are some of the stigmatizing names used in Acholi to refer to older women with failed marriages with or without children. As you can see from Evelyn’s quote, she is seen as a \textit{caromaa} because after her abduction, Evelyn started a new relationship with a man from Angaya clan and had two more children but has never been formally married. Like Evelyn, many participants in this study have been labelled names because they came back from captivity with children whose fathers they rejected as discussed in the previous chapter. Additionally, females rarely owned land in Acholi. The presumptive belief is that they will marry and leave their fathers’ homes to join their husbands. But what needs consideration is that a woman may be single or have a failed marriage. As a women’s rights activist noted:

\begin{quote}
The institution of marriage traditionally doesn’t respect them [women] that is why I said they are always judged, discriminated and they are taken as people who are not stable in relationships. We have over thirty women’s groups who are war victims, but these women say they [men] don’t take them seriously in their relationships. Either the man takes them as a second wife or a “side woman” but not an ideal woman for marriage. If the woman is married in the family, the family members will rise and say, ‘how can you marry a soldier, a fellow man, a fighter to be a wife?’\textsuperscript{125}
\end{quote}

A study we did fifteen years ago found that thirty seven percent of abducted women remarry upon returning home, but marrying non-abducted persons do not last due to stigma (Liu Institute for Global Issues and Gulu District NGO forum 2006, 2). This finding was also documented by Allen Kiconco (2015) in her work with similar categories of women in Acholi. Women’s identities associated with being former LRA fighters has caused them stigma, to be seen as fighters and perceived as men. This is because fighting is considered masculine, and a female former fighter cannot be managed as a wife in the Acholi traditional context. As seen in the previous chapter, and from the above quote, many participants have a challenge in getting

\textsuperscript{124} Key informant interview, Chairperson Women’s Advocacy Network, October 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 2019.
\textsuperscript{125} Key informant interview, Director Gulu Women’s Economic Development and Globalization, October 7\textsuperscript{th}, 2019.
partners or staying long in relationships even if their new husband genuinely want them. It is the woman who gets blamed for anything that goes wrong, even in circumstances in which her husband was also a former abductee. Besides being a fighter or a “man”, she is a *caromaa* in the eyes of in-laws. It is an indication of deeper gender inequalities that silence women. It is as though it was her fault that she was abducted and had children in captivity.

Generally, unmarried women, abducted or not, have a challenge accessing land in current Acholi. A study (Hopwood 2015) noted that women who separate from their husbands and return home traditionally accessed their paternal lands but this has been challenged by community members who instead view such women and their children as sources of land conflicts, complicated by what Whyte and Acio (2017) called “the nephew problem.” Whyte and Acio (2017, 28) define “the nephew problem” as the challenges faced by sons of women who left their husbands and returned to their original home with their children. Most participants are single because of their kinship ties with the rebels. What makes the situation worse, is that this association to the rebels has led to their rejection as noted by the findings of this study.

Traditionally, if a woman couldn’t access land from her marital home, her father’s clan should step in. But that is impossible for women like Akwero. She narrates: ‘I was told point blank that there was no land for my children. I cannot cling to men. The husband I got from here [home] tried to kill me with a spear, but the spear hit a tree trunk instead. We were separated by the Local Council. The issue of land made me call Palaro my home and land is the future for everyone. For you to call a place your home, you need to own the land.’¹²⁶ While Akwero accepted to be inherited by her forced husband’s brother in search for land in Palaro, WAN’s Chairperson Evelyn Amony describes how challenging it is for them to have access to land.

When you look at our situation, you find that there was no marriage and even if you find the home of your children, they will not treat you like the woman that was married in that home. The woman in that clan has the right to talk, inherit the husband’s property but for us who were abducted and made wives, even when you return and live in the man’s home

¹²⁶ Wang oo, Gulu town, October 11th, 2019.
today, for example, the wife of Opira, when she came back and went to live in Opira’s home. She has no right over things in that home like the woman who has been married.127

Customary practices elaborated by informants, demonstrate that single women have rights to access and own land at their father’s homes.128 The majority of participants are currently single because of separation from newly established relationships post abduction or rejection of wartime forced marriages. Women were forcefully taken away from home and given as wives to men who fathered their children. Upon returning home, they should have been considered like any other Acholi woman who was traditionally married, separated or divorced her husband or never married and has rights to her father’s land. Or better yet, her forced husband’s clan - like Opira’s wives that Evelyn mentioned above - should give them land in the absence of a formal marriage if the women wished to resettle in those clans and raise the children. But the greed for land is high, making it worse for women whose close relatives, fathers and/or forced husbands died in the war. In an interview with Lawirwodi (the Paramount Chief) of Acholi, he noted that in the past, Acholi had land that was enough for everybody including hunting grounds that could have been used to resettle these mothers:

In Acholi, we have land, which is being converted. For example, land that was used for hunting. We have huge pieces of such land in different places like Nwoya, but people and big farmers have taken over them. When you go to places like Kitgum and Lamwo, those parts of land are still there but unfortunately are being claimed by very few individuals and yet it was a basket for everyone to feed on. Those are the kinds of land that should have been given to those lacking where to live. But you know, because of greed, people have moved on and claimed the land. So, at least from the cultural aspect there was land for everybody at different times.129

Lawirwodi, as was the case with many key informants, stated that single women belonged to their father’s home:

Home for her is her father’s home…..It’s only because she is a woman and by the dictates of nature she has to go and live with another man elsewhere….When things don’t work,
she comes back home. When she comes back home, she is allocated a place. They would tell her that ‘okay you have come back maybe without any child you can put your house in that corner and grow your crops around this end.’ And that [land] becomes hers and she has the right over it to use it and nobody has the right to go and take her away from there or to go and interfere saying ‘you didn’t cultivate here on this land for the past two years, I am coming to use it’. No, it must be with her expressed permission because that is her area allocated to her by her father or maybe her brother or her mother depending on the circumstance of that family.

The Paramount chief continued to note that if the woman has children, she is given space to live and raise her children. She is also buried there when she dies. Her children are married as children of that home. But these children can be seen as problems. Still, a key informant notes:

Once a woman is married, her bride price is given to a brother in that home to marry a wife. So, if there is trouble at your marital home, you return straight to the house that has your bride price. Even if I am your brother but didn’t marry with your bride price, I will direct you to the home that has used your bride price. That home is like your land title. If she is not wanted in those areas, she runs to that home. To these women, having a house is the most important thing and a house sits on land. That is why they find land as the most important asset.¹³⁰

The majority of participants are single given that they were forced to be wives to rebel commanders and were rejected by their relatives leaving some with no choice but to accept wife inheritance that I discuss next.

5.2.2 Land and Wife Inheritance

Julian Hopwood (2015) noted that once a husband dies, culturally a widow will be “inherited” by one of her husband’s brothers. This way, her rights over land access are maintained within the clan. For example, one of my friends who survived wartime forced marriage has married her late husband’s brother in Nwoya district through wife inheritance.¹³¹ In a conversation with her, she primarily did this so that her sons born in captivity could access land in their paternal clan. Three

¹³⁰ Key informant interview, Local Council One, Awach Sub County, Gulu district, October 29th, 2019.
¹³¹ When a man dies, his brother takes over the responsibility of caring for his children and wives that remained alive. Upon agreement, or some courtship, the man becomes a husband to his brother’s wife. This is wife inheritance. It mostly. Happened for women whose bride price had been paid.
participants have also been inherited as wives by the brothers of their late forced husbands. In the words of Lapat: ‘the man that I am currently with learned from my colleagues [fellow abductees] that I have their child, but his brother had died in the bush. He started coming to visit me at GUSCO\textsuperscript{132} [reception center] when I had just given birth to the baby. He came up to our home. So, I decided to go to their home. Up until now, I am at their home.’\textsuperscript{133}

Since the start of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, wife inheritance has become a rarer occurrence in Acholi (Hopwood 2015), at the same time, it still happens in rural areas since participants need land in their marital homes, and desire to maintain their identities with the clan. As was the case with Ajok who was inherited as a wife by the brother of her children’s father (Baines and Stewart 2011), urban participants reported being approached for inheritance by their late husbands’ relatives but rejected because they considered the practice backward, feared diseases like HIV/AIDS and that their potential suitors in those clans who approached them were very old.\textsuperscript{134} Anyadwe narrates:

> His dad came to our home, talked to my relatives, and asked, if possible, I should go back so that his brother or the clan may inherit [marry] me as a wife, and I continue to stay there because I had their children. But on my side, I had decided that it was not my interest. I was forced. Even if children are there, laku (wife inheritance) is another thing. It is almost like the same life we lived from there [bush]…They brought an old man with a “rotten chest” due to a bad cough that seems to have lasted for so long [group laughs]. I would have preferred their son….He used to come to my place. He would be sent to come and check on us so that by the time I go to their home, I would just accept him.\textsuperscript{135}

For Lapat, there seemed to have been some element of courtship with her brother-in-law, while attempts to set up Anyadwe with the “old man” failed as she felt it was a continuation of the forced marriage. Another perspective that women like Anyadwe raised is the fact that some of

\textsuperscript{132} Gulu Support the Children’s Organization is a rehabilitation center for abducted children in Gulu district.

\textsuperscript{133} Initial workshop with women, Gulu town, August 20\textsuperscript{th}, 2019.

\textsuperscript{134} The fear of HIV/AIDS is connected to the risks of polygamy or a situation where a man has more than one wife. Most men who inherit wives often took these women as a second or 3\textsuperscript{rd} wife as was the case with the three participants. With Gulu being one of districts in Uganda with the highest rates of HIV prevalence, women feared contracting the disease if they were one of wives to one man.

\textsuperscript{135} Focus group discussions, Gulu town, August 31\textsuperscript{st}, 2019.
the late men’s relatives were looking for a mother figure for their late son’s children. Overwhelmed by the many grand children being brought home, they felt if they brought one of the former wives, under the disguise of wife inheritance, she would help look after all the children of their son. In addition, the Paramount Chief noted that the purpose of wife inheritance is primarily to care for children and the wife of a deceased brother, not to literally turn her into a wife, noting that courtship should be involved if there was going to be intimacy.

The way I understand this issue of [wife] inheritance, purely, it was for taking responsibility. It was not about you having an affair. Your brother has died, and the wife is there, and the children are also there. You will have to stand in for your dead brother and continue giving them the services that their father used to give them and then if you want that woman to become your wife, there must be courtship again. So, you don’t just choose her to be your wife or pick her like a property. If it goes through that [courtship], you will find that the relationship is built up slowly and the two will live comfortably together without abuses. But because of greed, I would say people make short cuts, they think the woman is there and vulnerable with children and has no financial help, protection, and all that.\textsuperscript{136}

Indeed, some of these men who inherited these women took advantage of their vulnerability. They sometimes approached the women when they had just returned and were at reception centers. Women and children need to have a place to live. Since some women could not access land through their fathers’ homes or their marriages, remarrying a brother of a late forced husband was one way to access land. While these women faced challenges with polygamy, women who started relationships with the brothers of their “husbands” may have a better relationship than if it were their own husbands because his brother would have courted her. Even if land was a huge factor in women considering wife inheritance, polygamy, land wrangles and population pressure has made it challenging for those who did it. Participants also face stigma from their co-wives who were already married in those homes, and this situation is exacerbated by the challenges of raising more children produced in those relationships. I quote Lapat:

There is plenty of land as they are living on their ancestral land. But the challenge is only one person has four wives and so many children as the rate of giving birth is also high. He doesn’t allow if you say that you want to go for family planning. I don’t even have

\textsuperscript{136} Key informant interview, Ker Kwaro Acholi, October 21\textsuperscript{st}, 2019, Rwot David Onen Acana II, Gulu Town.
any knowledge. We just continued giving birth. Now I have seven children. Yet I returned from the bush with only one child. I glance at home; I see my brother who drinks to the point that he doesn’t even know his mother’s name. My father is having a very bad disease that doesn’t cure on his leg. He has cancer….On this hand, you find that the man [husband] is just increasing on the number of women given he is a bit literate.\textsuperscript{137}

As this sub section discussed, the need for women to have a place to live with their children born in captivity was one of the factors that led some women to decide to settle in their late forced husbands’ homes through a practice called wife inheritance. As will be presented in the next section, the need for their children to be raised in their paternal clans, to have a cultural identity, and access to land, influenced women’s decision to accept marriage proposals from their children’s uncles. For example, speaking of two other women who weren’t participants in this study but also survived wartime forced marriage and sexual violence, Langec illustrates this point: ‘they decided at once that they will live in the place where the land of their children’s father is. They have agreed to raise the children in their own clan not any other place.’\textsuperscript{138}

Through this study, I learned that about six women have engaged in this practice for the sake of land. Two that I quoted earlier, my friend from Nwoya, Opira’s forced wife and the two that Langec mentioned. In summary, women in Acholi culture have just two ways of accessing land, either through their fathers or through marriage. Outside of these traditions, a woman can purchase land although affordability is always a challenge, especially since participants are poor. This leaves women with a strong thirst for land, as a place-based sense of justice presented next.

5.3 Land: A Place-Based Sense of Justice

Results show that the majority of women in this study defined their sense of justice as their ability to access and own land. I called it a place-based sense of justice because its achievement surrounds the issue of place, home, and identity. In this section, I illustrate how women articulated their demands for justice and how land is defined as home, identity, livelihood,

\textsuperscript{137} Initial workshop with women, Gulu town, August 20th, 2019. Lapat’s husband is perceived as literate because he is a teacher who earns salary. Formal education can be equated to having money, that allows a man to marry more women.
\textsuperscript{138} Oral history interview, Gulu town, September 26th, 2019.
healing, and spirituality. Often, calls for land as justice were directed towards the government on the basis that government failed to prevent their abduction, but participants recognise that their families and the cultural institution of Ker Kwaro Acholi can support their access to land.

![Figure 14: Place-based justice](image)

### 5.3.1 Land is Home

What I want is a piece of land because where I am right now, we do not have land and there are a lot of land wrangles.\(^{139}\) So, when I get land, then I will feel that justice is served correctly. And secondly my children should go to school and study then that will be justice to me.\(^{140}\)

Participants indicated that land provides a sense of home and belonging for them and their children (see figure 11). There is a saying that goes, “East or West, home is best.” But participants like Larem who was abducted and kept in captivity for long, home hasn’t been the best due to stigma and rejection. Since women accessed land through marriage or their father’s homes, being single and rejected by parents have left women with no land to call home. An

\(^{139}\) Land wrangles in Acholi became worse after the war because elders who knew boundary markers had died. More than a decade’s time spent in IDP camps meant the young lost these boundaries and are often sources of conflicts.

\(^{140}\) Oral history interview, Gulu town, September 10\(^{th}\), 2019.
actual home or place to live, to retire after a day’s work is nearly absent for participants. Some participants have been both landless and homeless to the point that they had to temporarily live with their relatives amidst harsh conditions of stigma. Permanence connected to owning land where they can build a place to call home is what will address this homelessness and offer housing security for the women and their children. This absence of place to build a home has pushed mothers like Larem to urban centers where they cannot afford rent and other services. Like Larem, Aleng’s quote above indicates that acquiring land is the justice she feels she needs to live.

Additionally, participants indicated that having land can reduce social stigma. Having a place to call home, according to participants will save them from name calling and insults from their relatives or communities that gave them temporary places to live. In one woman’s words, ‘it is like we have brought hate and wrangles to our communities and country. The youths’ cry has been heard by the government, but the children of former captives do not have that kind of help coming from the government. They have forgotten about us. The government should get for us where to settle and call our home to minimize stigma and heartache.’ Participants who have been rejected stated that their rejection was in connection to the assumption that there was no land for them, and their fatherless children.

In an interview with Angela Atim, Director of Watyer Ki Gen (WKG), an NGO that works with children born in captivity and their mothers, ‘[the] majority of these women were not welcomed back with their children. Much as they have tried a lot to support their children, even if the relationship with their families is there, they had already been excluded, and they always go home as visitors.’ Where is home for mothers if they go home as visitors?

141 There have been government programmes with specific focus to youths like the Youth Livelihood Projects, The Northern Uganda Reconstruction Program (NUREP), the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) and the Peace, Recovery, and development programme (PRDP). This participant is referring to these as positive responses to youth’s cry for help.
142 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 23rd, 2019.
143 Key informant interview, Watyer Ki Gen, Gulu, October 12th, 2019.
Women who have been forced wives and had children in captivity stated it is the responsibility of the Ugandan government to give them land to build their homes, a place to live permanently, whether married or not. I quote Nyapolo:

Some of our parents do not want to live with us because we were rebels. If the government accepts to give us help, even getting for us plots of land that we call our own, where we can put our small huts. That could make our lives easier......When we go to our husbands, their people say we are demon possessed yet when we go to our parents you also find that they do not want to live with us. Even our children do not have what to call home and we do not know where to start [life] from.... we from captivity are mistreated and stigmatized. So, if the government can accept and get for us where to settle then we would feel much better and at ease.144

Rejection of women like Nyapolo due to their association with the rebels has been widely reported (Akello 2013; Apio 2016; Baines and Stewart 2011; Kiconco 2015). Evelyn narrates:

The mothers cried to the government to get for them land because when you own land, you can start your own clan where you are settled. Secondly, most clans do not want the children that we came back with from captivity. When we leave these children with our families, they are mistreated and stigmatized. They may not beat our children, but they use abusive language against them. When you-the mother-comes back, your child would start asking, how they were born in captivity and the whereabouts of their fathers and asking what it means by being born in captivity. These things break our hearts, and we break down in tears because we find it very difficult to explain to these children because they were still very young to understand what happened, and this is one of the bigger challenges we are facing as mothers.145

Similarly, Ms. Pamela Angwech, Director of a women’s rights organization, says: ‘that is where they can define their homes with these children who have no home because they need to start a home with the kids. They need where the kids can call their home and their family. They need where they can farm their own food and that is why every woman is narrowing to land and we see sense in it.’146

144 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 23rd, 2019.
145 Key informant interview, Women’s Advocacy Network, Gulu, October 3rd, 2019.
146 Key informant interview, GWEDG, Gulu, October 7th, 2019.
Findings also indicate that having a place to live improves relationships between women with their extended families, communities and neighbors who had rejected them. Participants argued that when they get their own land, they would cease being viewed as threats by those around them. Commercialization of land, negative perception by communities that people returning from the LRA are possessed with evil spirits, are killers, and the burden of raising children born in captivity are among factors that underpinned rejection. When women have their own land, these threats that led to their rejection from the land will reduce as they will be on their own. Their relatives may desire to visit them and reconnect. For example, WKG, which has been buying land and donating it to children born in captivity and their mothers also reported that women for whom they bought land were having their relatives who had rejected them return to them. Participants felt that owning land will not only improve their relationships, but also give them a sense of pride that comes with having a place to call home and reduces their dependency on their fathers or forced husband’s families. For example, as one woman put it:

"The government should get for us somewhere to settle so that our relatives can come and visit us in our homes. If one day someone buys for me a piece of land to settle in, I would start dancing from Saint Maurice till the roundabout in town [about 5kms] be it the Acholi dance or any other kind of dance. So that people can know that my problems have been solved. So that my people can look for me and visit me in my home."  

### 5.3.2 Land is Identity of Women and Their Children

In Acholi culture, identity is tied to land. As described earlier, women’s identities are determined through marriage or paternal clans of origin. Children who are raised by rejected single mothers lack a sense of identity and belonging. Yet many are now young adults, including those in their late teens, twenties, or even thirties. A study on the experiences of these children in Acholi reported that they are excluded from the places of the everyday life such as schools and homes, especially children whose identities as children born in captivity are known or those living with their stepfathers (Stewart 2021). When I asked the Gulu District Chairperson for his opinions on

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147 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 23rd, 2019.
women’s demand for land as justice, he gave a detailed explanation that sums up women’s and children’s identity and belonging. I quote:

It is such a painful thing for an Acholi child, woman or man, not to have land because that’s the beginning of losing your sense of identity….. If you are an Acholi, you should have a clear ancestry and once you have a clear ancestry, you must have land because ancestral land belongs to that lineage. But when people begin to kick you out of that, in other words, they are not just kicking you out of the land, probably they are telling you, ‘You don’t belong here, you are not part of us.’ …… So, it is not just only the land. It is much bigger than the land. When you see somebody struggling, almost dying over a small piece of land, it is not just that land, it is about struggling to keep that identity so that you don’t lose that sense of belonging. Because when you lose your land, you lose almost everything. First, you will no longer be part of that society because you don’t have even where to put your house. Secondly……your sense of livelihood is then shattered. So, there is so much that is connected to land.148

WKG has documented 1,175 children born in captivity in seven districts in northern Uganda by the time of this research. They noted that their documentation was still ongoing as data was yet to be updated. Therefore, there are no complete statistics of how many children were born in rebel captivity in northern Uganda, besides the ongoing work of this organization. Still, this tells us that there are many children struggling, together with their mothers, on identity issues. The biggest challenge for survivors of wartime sexual violence and forced marriage is connected to their children born as a result of these harms (See also Stewart 2020). For example, identity stigmatization is a barrier in rebuilding the lives of these children (Denov and Piolanti 2021). Yet stigmatizing children born in the LRA can be understood as a mechanism of placemaking that excludes the children from belonging (Stewart 2021). This is particularly common in the aftermath of violence in Gulu where war-affected persons struggle to remake damaged family places such as homesteads, community-level playgrounds, and educational facilities like schools. These very places that are supposed to enhance reintegration and recovery of children born from captivity become the very mechanism for their exclusion because children are stigmatized by teachers and school mates or their own extended families they reunited with. Relatively, a study on similar children in Colombia reported that they are not recognized as independent subjects in

148 Key informant interview, Gulu District Chairperson, October 10th, 2019.
need of redress like any other war-affected children (Parra 2018). In the context of Northern Uganda, this lack of recognition erases children’s existence as a victim group desiring redress. They are seen as secondary victims of sexual violence against their mothers. Therefore, women’s demands for place-based justice, in the form of land, would guarantee children’s identities going forward.

Results of this study illustrate that land is a sense of justice that provides identity for mothers and their children born in captivity. Male and female children that belong to single women are referred to as okeyo and lakeyo respectively by their maternal relatives. Okeyo and lakeyo have limited access to land at their maternal homes because of customary laws that stipulates access to land primarily through paternal clans. They do not traditionally own land in their mothers’ clans. Even if an okeyo marries a woman while in a maternal clan, he doesn’t have the same authority as his counterparts would over land claims. Very few families allow them to utilise and permanently own land. If there are any land shortages or wrangles, okeyo are the first to be excluded on grounds that their land is at their father’s clans. Faced with rejection and land shortages, A participant stated:

I hope to get bigger land in the future. As you know, these children don’t have a clan or a home. I want to get big land somewhere to start for them their own clan. The Acholi do not want these children. People don’t want them everywhere.\textsuperscript{149}

This woman currently owns a small piece of land near Gulu Town. However, she is raising several children born in captivity at her home, the reason she is longing to have a larger piece of land is to meet this expanding need. Her children’s paternal relatives have not welcomed them, in their father’s absence. Like her, many participants’ husbands remained in the bush-alive or dead. Some concealed their identity to the women for fear of consequences of their actions when the war ends. This left mothers without a place to take the children and tell them that ‘this is your home, or this is your father’s home.’ Okeyo and lakeyo have a threatened identity as I quote Lagen and Langec respectively:

\textsuperscript{149} Initial workshop with women, Gulu town, August 20\textsuperscript{th}, 2019
We all have the same issue. The issue of land. Many children today are not wanted at their maternal homes because of the widespread land wrangles in the region. A nephew has no right or power over land at his maternal home…There is no land for my child.

Even if you live with your child in your home with all the happiness that you get as a mother, your child will never experience that peace. Because he will be okeyo. It is also in the Bible. The Bible says that ‘no okeyo has any luck at his mother’s home’.

Additionally, some of the children’s fathers rejected them upon returning from rebel captivity. For example: ‘some of us came with children with their fathers but the father of these children rejected them. When the fathers of these children take them to their homes, their grandmothers reject them saying their sons are what they want, not what they came back with. You find that these children have nowhere to go.’ However, even when some participants reunited with commanders in hopes of getting land since they had been rejected, some husbands had also been rejected by their families. Key informant interviews confirmed these types of rejection that connect to why women defined land as their sense of justice:

They [women] are seen as problems, they are seen as people returning and giving more challenges to the people and now compounded with land wrangles, land conflicts, where are they? I want to give a living example, in one of the communities in Koch Goma where a man returned, this is a man not a woman. They told him that he was already buried to cut a long story short. They showed him the grave and a hoe that was used to bury him. They were informed three years ago that the man had died. They asked him, ‘...Is it your ghost that has returned?’ Because he was the head of the family and he was the one in charge of land inheritance, his land was already distributed among the family and his wife had been “thrown” out of the home. So, the wife left and when he came back, he asked for unity of his family and the family he returned to. But the family said, ‘we had already buried you sometime back.’

In summary, if fathers and husbands are rejected and kicked out of their land in a patrilineal society like Acholi, they lose their identities. Their children and wives end up with no land and

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150 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 23rd, 2019
151 Oral history interview, Gulu town, September 26th, 2019
152 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 23rd, 2019
153 Key informant interview, GWEDG, Gulu, October 7th, 2019
154 In Acholi, identity and land are inseparable. Children belong to their father’s clans and male children can only make claims to land ownership in their paternal clans.
ultimately, no identities. Even if reuniting with forced husbands assumed that their children born in captivity would access land at their paternal homes, it never worked out as envisioned. This was the case for Laber and Larem quoted below respectively:

The life back home is not easy and sometimes I get angry that it was my stupidity that made me come back home because I am living with a man whose family home is there, but we live like he has no home. Sometimes I wonder whether his mother gave birth to him from a different home and relocated to the present one. But he said he comes from that clan. That he was born in that family. Then I asked why they do not mention his name in any of the things at their home and they do not care about him getting anything as a child of that family. My worry is these things may also happen to my children because of what is happening to their father. Someone may think my children’s clan is in Gulu Town here.\textsuperscript{155}

The father of my children was a very young boy when he was abducted by the LRA. He did not have any piece of land by then. When I was living with Evelyn and others, I decided that I needed to go to my husband’s paternal home and get some garden and land because I have male children. When I went there, it was not easy. Wherever we tried to dig, someone came up claiming that the land [was theirs].\textsuperscript{156}

Both Laber and Larem live near Gulu Town. The paternal clans of their children are known. Unfortunately, they have been denied use of their paternal lands. Laber’s son went to his father’s village in Pabbo to make charcoal, sell and get money to pay his own school fees but he was denied use of the land. Likewise, Larem went to her husband’s village with her children, and made bricks for building a hut\textsuperscript{157} but they had no land to build on. They returned to Gulu town in tears. It is this denial and rejection that has informed women’s choices of land as their sense of justice. A kind of justice that not only benefits women and their children, but also, former LRA commanders who were rejected by their clans particularly those who reunited with the women.

In other situations, the identities of these children born in captivity are questioned:

The children are not seen as part of the community. The children are seen as aliens to the community. The children are seen as the people that remind the community about the

\textsuperscript{155} Initial workshop with women, Gulu town, August 20\textsuperscript{th}, 2019
\textsuperscript{156} Initial workshop with women, Gulu town, August 20\textsuperscript{th}, 2019
\textsuperscript{157} A grass-thatched house commonly constructed by the Acholi, and many African societies.
war, even more. This has affected the women and in many of the platforms that we had conversations with them, it would even be much easier for them to be reintegrated if they came back without children. The identities of the children have been questioned in those communities.\textsuperscript{158}

The questioning of identities happens because the fathers of these children are either dead or remained in the bush and mothers are unable to verify with him the location of his land. Additionally, the community lacks an understanding of how life was inside the LRA. There is an assumption that there was gang rape, and so the paternity of children is questioned. But as indicated already in chapter one, the LRA had a forced marriage system and the women know who the fathers of their children are, except they are unable to trace their relatives if they died or remained in the bush. It is hard to establish the truth of births. Only on rare occasions, DNA tests are available. It is against this background that when asked what their senses of justice were, mothers called upon the government to support child and family tracing so that children can have land, their identity. For example: ‘The government should open its eyes and help locate the fathers of these children, not the children having to look for their fathers.’\textsuperscript{159}

WKG and the WAN conduct child tracing activities, a process initiated to identify and locate children’s paternal identities with the intention of uniting them with their children. Some of these “traces” were successful, but challenges were encountered in other cases. WKG noted in my interview with them that paternal families receive the children ceremoniously because they see them being taken in non-governmental organization (NGO) cars and from Gulu town, but they still do not give the children land. That is why WKG embarked on purchasing land in the children’s names. WAN has, however, reunited some children with their paternal families who apportioned them land. Recent research demonstrated the significance of WAN’s child tracing activities on the reintegration of children born in captivity and their mothers (Baines and Oliveira 2020; Mutsonziwa, Anyeko, and Baines 2020). These studies highlight child tracing as a survivor-led and transformational initiative that secure the future of children born of forced marriage by establishing family relationships with paternal clans. Establishing these relationships

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{158}] Key informant interview, GWEDG, Gulu, October 7\textsuperscript{th}, 2019
\item[\textsuperscript{159}] Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 2019.
\end{itemize}
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provides land access to the children and their mothers, a sense of belonging and paternal support towards raising children. Participants have hailed the work of WKG in purchasing plots of land for children born in captivity as it has given them a home to live and a sense of identity. However, participants continue to demand a place-based sense of justice through land acquisition to adequately fulfil their identity and belonging needs. Aside from land as identity, women also connected place-based justice to livelihood as I explore next.

5.3.3 Land is Livelihood

Women also articulated that land is a place for livelihood activities. It is the main source of livelihood in Northern Uganda after nearly three decades of war that left people impoverished. As I will present in the next chapter, women are unable to meet their daily needs and called for what I termed needs-based justice. This inability to meet their basic needs is because they didn’t get formal education after years in rebel captivity, and land is a significant source of livelihood for the women and their children. Yet women are often blamed by community members, that they do not want to work hard, because they live around urban centers, to get NGO assistance. As one woman stated:

We requested for the President to come and talk to us and hear our issues, but he has never responded. People keep saying that we are not used to staying in the village but used to staying in town to beg for help. We do not want to beg, and we can work, but we do not have the land for us to do the cultivation and settle. So, we cannot go and cultivate on trees.\(^{160}\)

As indicated in this quote, I argue that the absence of land to build a home, live, belong, grow crops, and do other economic activities, is equal to the absence of justice. One’s existence is contested by those who reject them access and utilization of land. Land is a place-based kind of justice that would meet many women’s recovery, healing, and reintegration needs. As a women’s rights activist stated:

\(^{160}\) Wang oo, Gulu town, Oct 11\(^{th}\), 2019.
You want to educate yourself, you need land. You want good health, you need land. You want equal wellbeing, you need land. You want good feeding, you need land. You want economic empowerment even for women now, we need land. Why? The war has destroyed everything that we had before and what is left is the land we are living on…and the war on land is so strong now. There is commercialization but, there is land wrangle [and] land conflict, these are hot spots. Everything is land because it is the only source of livelihood and destiny……So that is the thing now, all of them are asking for land because land seems to be the only place for destiny and source for livelihood and income.\textsuperscript{161}

Land is the women’s destiny because once they own it, they are there permanently as no one can evict them and their children unless if a wrangle starts. Land addresses one important aspect of women’s reintegration challenges. For example, participants reported that when they have land, they can till and feed their children with the harvests. They can sell the harvests and use the money to educate their children and meet their family’s medical and other needs. They can build permanent homes and raise domestic animals and birds, that can be sources of livelihoods. They will feel that justice has been done if they are able to carry out these activities on their own pieces of land like any other person, whether male or female. This underscores women’s need to be accepted as a full person, with or without a husband or father, and overturns existing gender norms in Northern Uganda. As the woman above contested the label of her being a beggar, a key informant, The Archbishop His Grace Dr. John Baptist Odama, agreed:

You see in a tradition when a woman is married, she takes over the property of the family and one of the key properties is land. That is where I said, she feeds the children. And that is where also animals will have food like grass to eat. It is also a way of telling the others that ‘I am not a beggar; I eat at my home. You see, I have a home.’ When you have land, you can build the house and [do] everything for livelihood and feed the family.\textsuperscript{162}

Concurrent with the Archbishop’s and Ms. Angwech’s views, a key informant supported the women’s appeals for land and suggested that affordable housing be constructed for them and their children:

\textsuperscript{161} Key informant interview, GWEDG, Gulu, October 7\textsuperscript{th}, 2019.
\textsuperscript{162} Key informant interview, Gulu Archdiocese, Gulu, October 16\textsuperscript{th}, 2019
My observations are, if government had the ability, they should buy for them [women] land and build for them houses so that they have a place to stay. You know human life depends on your ability to have a place where you sleep and wake up from. A place you can return to after work. What I observed currently is that, when families of these women are requested to give a small piece of land for them to build a house, they often refused.\textsuperscript{163}

As I will discuss in the next chapter, participants further asked for descent housing as a needs-based sense of justice, on top of land that they felt contributes to healing.

5.3.4 Land is Healing

Some women in the study argued that when they have a place to stay, the pain of sexual violence and forced marriage they endured, heals gradually. Ability to live descent lives and afford everyday needs post these harms contributes to women’s recovery. For example:

If the government can buy for us land to settle in, it would be better. As for the children, some well-wishers may come along and sponsor them to study. When they study, they will supplement on what the government has provided [land] and that would ease and heal our hearts. Our only cry is where to live because we do not have anywhere to go.\textsuperscript{164}

Participants’ hearts cannot heal when they do not have places to live. Worse still, they are struggling to find places to raise these children born because of suffering their fathers inflicted on their mothers. Without a sense of place through access to land, even if psychosocial needs are met, women’s complete healing remains unachievable. How can one recover from harm when they are landless and nearly homeless? Practically, women who are renting are at the verge of becoming homeless when rent becomes unaffordable, underscoring their demand for land.

Further, participants viewed ownership of land as the most important sense of justice because of the peace, security and healing that comes with having it. I argue that land and/or having a place to live is therapeutic because it gives survivors of wartime sexual violence and forced marriage a

\textsuperscript{163} Key informant interview, Local Council One, Awach Sub County, Gulu district, October 29\textsuperscript{th}, 2019

\textsuperscript{164} Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 23\textsuperscript{nd}, 2019
sense of safety and inner peace. This is relevant in Acholi society where there are so many things connected to owning or accessing land, as already discussed. For example, senses of home, identity, livelihoods, and spirituality are elements that I present next. When all these things that women feel are achievable through land are provided, I contend that the women will feel some level of healing in ways that they had never had before. According to one participant, land is the most crucial thing for achieving place-based justice:

My people, I only see one thing, not much. You see, our children may be taken to school, but they will not have somewhere to stay. You may take a child to school but where will he or she stay when he or she comes back from school? They will not have anywhere to live. For me, what I feel heals my heart is getting for me where to stay with my child. Even if you do not take my child to school and you give me where to stay [land] it would heal my heart and make my life better. Where I can put my small hut, or a house that is the size of a pit latrine and call it my land, and my home. I can struggle with my children when it comes to taking them to school.165

5.4 Land and Spirituality in Acholi

Having heard the demand for place-based justice through ownership of land, I asked the key informants for their thoughts on why this was the case. Besides supporting the women’s arguments for land as presented above, several informants raised another perspective. They thought the women were not just asking for land, per se, but are looking to fulfill spiritual ties to land in Acholi tradition as well.166

The first aspect of land and spirituality is the relationship between the living, the dead and the unborn. It is believed in Acholi that the living, the dead, and the unborn own and have relationships to land in special ways. For example, Hon. Ojara Martin Mapenduzi states that ‘Land in the Acholi perspective belongs to three people. It belongs to the dead, the present and the future. Yes! By the way those who died own the land, those who live today own it and those who are not yet born also own it.’167 This view is crucial as sometimes graves of our ancestors

165 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 23rd, 2019.
166 It is debatable whether land purchased for these women by Watyer Ki Gen can fulfill this spiritual bearing.
167 Key informant interview, Gulu District LCV Chairperson, October 10th, 2019.
became markers and evidence as to who had the right claim over contested land. Graves, in the past, were marked by planting trees that were not supposed to be cut. Such trees were monuments in remembrance of the dead, but at the same time the trees maintained a connection and continuity to the life of the dead as they relate to the living. For example, I visited my maternal village in Pader district in northern Uganda in 2015 where I got the chance to see my great grandfather’s grave. A huge tree called Kituba stood on it. I couldn’t see the actual tombstone but my grandfather’s sister who was close to 100 years old told me that the tree was planted on the grave. Such land could never be contested as my maternal family has a connection with our deceased great grandfather whose life continues in the tree that still stood strong years later.

The second aspect to spirituality that the study found was that land has a spiritual connection and owning it brought a sense of divine justice and identity. Before the coming of colonialists and Christianity, Acholi people had their own ways of practicing spirituality, religion, and worship, and some still hold these connections with each clan having its own god with a specific name. For example, Lawirwodi Rwot David Onen Acana II narrates:

In Acholi generally according to our traditions and customs, land has some spiritual bearing, that is, our ancestors. Our ancestors brought these lands for us, and it is where we are all going to be buried when we die and still, we are connected to our ancestors. On the other hand, our spiritual bearing like the gods, our gods, because every place or clan in Acholi has a god. Like our clan [called] Payira has kalawinya. So, that is the spirit and our god. When I want to pray, not these conventional religious prayers, I pray through our god, that is the god of Payira [clan]. That also gives you identity because you are from Payira and you align yourself to the god of Payira that comes along with your mwoc. And that is why these women are very clever as they are talking of ‘if I knew’ [the clan of my children], because they are simply looking for a spiritual identity for their children.\textsuperscript{168}

As Lawirwodi put it, women are looking for a spiritual identity for their children. Christianity is recent and has impacted Acholi cultures and philosophies regarding prayer, worship, and spirituality. Christianity was introduced, promoted, and engrained in Acholi by colonial

\textsuperscript{168} Key informant interview, Ker Kwaro Acholi, Gulu, October 21\textsuperscript{st}, 2019.
Missionaries as early as the 1903 when Rwot Awich of Acholi invited the missionaries to the region.\textsuperscript{169} Christian doctrines preached against Acholi spiritual beliefs as backward, immoral, and evil, and needed saving and civilization by Westerners. For example, Catholicism was materialized in Acholi society through structures like boarding schools and hospitals operated by Priests, Brothers, Nuns and Catechists. In fact, many Acholi from my generation are Christians, Muslims, Seventh Day Adventists, and Jehovah Witnesses,\textsuperscript{170} and do not believe in Acholi gods. We have been raised, each in our own way, to see Acholi spirituality as inappropriate. But some Acholi, including the abducted, still believe in traditional spirituality despite colonial influence and the imposition of foreign religions. However, many participants became “Born Again” Christians upon exiting abduction while others continue to hold beliefs in both Acholi spirituality and an externally introduced religion.

Still, as Lawirwodi mentioned, land is like a bridge between the Acholi people and their ancestors. Often when people die in Gulu, they are supposed to be buried in their ancestral land. It was during the war when some people were buried in purchased land around Gulu town or in the IDP camps. Some of these graves were exhumed and remains of loved ones were transferred to their ancestral homes-usually accompanied with traditional reburial rituals or prayer ceremonies for Christians or Muslims. Another example of how Acholi people are connected to land is when a baby is born, the umbilical cord is supposed to be returned and buried on their ancestral land. Ancestral land is usually land belonging to the paternal lineage of the child. A key informant, Hon. Ojara Martin Mapenduzi, elaborated the relevance of land as it connects to ancestry and identity:

Do you understand why an Acholi would want to die for his or her land? I will tell you 'This is where my umbilical cord was buried.'\textsuperscript{171} You need to understand the connection between the umbilical cord, the land and the human being. When your umbilical cord is buried, by the way, let me tell you this, have you ever asked why an Acholi woman, even if she delivers from Kampala [Uganda’s capital], will wrap the umbilical cord in a paper,

\textsuperscript{169} See https://dacb.org/histories/uganda-history-christianity/ for details.
\textsuperscript{170} This list is not exhaustive as Christians are further divided into Catholics, Anglicans, and Born Again among others.
\textsuperscript{171} Burying a child’s umbilical cord at home is a symbolic ritual that binds the child with its land and its ancestors who were long buried on that land.
takes it to the village [ancestral land] and bury? Why don’t they bury from Kampala? Because that is not their ancestral land. Some of us who were born away from home, our umbilical cords were brought back home. It shows our connection to our ancestry and the land, and that’s why we call it ancestral land.\textsuperscript{172}

The issue of ancestry as it connects to land is complicated for participants because as already discussed, this ancestral identity is lacking for the majority of their children and perhaps most of the umbilical cords of children born in captivity were not brought back and buried at home as it should have been done culturally. I learned from a few participants in the study that some of their children born in captivity have behavioral, identity, and health challenges that sometimes required the performance of traditional rituals. It remains unclear whether the mothers connect the problems the children experience to their lack of knowledge of their ancestral lands, and inability to reside and identify with their ancestors. Mothers did not explicitly make spiritual connections but asked for land to live a kind of justice that is relevant for them and their children. While this is an area of further research, it helps us understand women’s demands for land as it connects to Acholi cultural ways of being and spirituality.

The third spiritual aspect that emerged was land and sacredness. Building on what Lawirwodi described regarding each clan in Acholi having their own gods, there were sacred areas and places of worship for each clan or family. These places were called *Abila, Kac* or *Wang Kac* (shrines). The shrines were on ancestral lands and were respectable places for offerings, thanksgiving, prayers, and sacrifices. Acholi people often referred to *abila pa wora* (my father’s shrine). The gods could be consulted in times of calamities. Harvests would be offered to the gods when there were good yields from farmers. There was a relationship of spiritually and worship that revolved around nature and shrines in Acholi. The gods of some clans were perceived to exist in water bodies, big trees, hills, or land among others. I quote Archbishop His Grace John Baptist Odama:

\begin{quote}
You know our spirituality here, in fact, land and God were not apart. They were taking God’s presence in the land [and] in the universe together. That is why they gave more respect to kinds of things like rivers, [and] valleys. You were not supposed to touch the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{172} Key informant interview, Gulu District Chairperson, Gulu, October 10th, 2019.
valley anyhow or else they will say you have cut the head of the spirit….. You were not supposed to break the branches of big trees unless they fell, and you can pick the dried branches but not to go up to cut it. No. It was considered as a jok [spirit]. You know there was a question of jok consistently. There was the jok of land, the jok of water, the jok of all these. So, there was consistent linkage with nature. For them [Acholi], nature and God were connected. So, misuse of land would be an abuse of God. They may not have in their tradition the belief in the supreme God but there were smaller gods connected with their relationships up there.\(^{173}\)

Even if a lot has changed in recent Acholi worship and spirituality due to Christianity, the demand for place-based justice by the women challenges Acholi’s religious beliefs. It is the same Acholi people who belief in the spiritual significance of land to one’s wellbeing that rejected these women and their children from accessing their ancestral lands. I argue that the long time spent in abduction coupled by the influence of Christianity and Islam that condemned Acholi spirituality as evil obscured participants connection of their quest for justice in land to spirituality. This lack of connection whether consciously or unconsciously illustrates the success of foreign religion in infiltrating the Acholi society. As stated earlier, women like Larem and Laber are married to their forced husbands but have not been granted access to utilize or settle on their ancestral lands. Stigma affected relationships between women and their families or communities. The single mother with children whose clans of identity are unknown are part of this debate. While women who believe in Acholi spirituality may desire to connect their children to ancestral lands, give opportunities to practice their culture and spirituality in connection to land, the doors have been shut. The fathers of these children who concealed their identities and Acholi people who rejected these women and their children shut these doors. With or without this spiritual connection, the women need land to live. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of results in the next section.

5.5 Discussion and Conclusion

According to Harvey M. Weinstein and Eric Stover (cited in Goodmark 2015, 726), ‘justice, like beauty, is in the eyes of the beholder and can be interpreted in a variety of ways.’ Goodmark

\(^{173}\) Key informant interview, Gulu Archdiocese, October 16\(^{th}\), 2019
(2015) agrees that justice has different meanings for both people who define and seek it. Participants defined justice as something that is dependent on availability of land. Land has several meanings to participants like senses of home, identity, spiritual connections, and livelihoods. I have discussed wife inheritance as it relates to land, and land as a path to achieving lived justice. I have also discussed how land gives women security, power, and restores control in the aftermath of violence, but also, how it grounds these thoughts in justice literature.

Land is a path to achieving lived justice, a theory this study develops. Lived justice, according to participants can be achieved by accessing land to live, belong, call home, and do economic activities. As presented earlier, land could have been accessed through the women’s paternal homes, children’s paternal clans and women’s new marital homes. But many of these avenues are unavailable. As was the case with wife inheritance, women are willing to do whatever it takes to have a place to live with their children regardless of the risks, costs and sacrifices involved. My work with the women in Northern Uganda indicated that their children are their priority. See also (Liu Institute for Global Issues and Gulu District NGO Forum 2006). And as you read in the previous chapter, ‘the mother of the rat dies for its child.’ The women decided to continue living with their forced husbands for the sake of their children and land. In the absence of land through these avenues, women called for opportunities to own land. I argue that land is a key arm of lived justice because it provides place on which all else can happen. It addresses many reintegration challenges women experience because of their wartime sexual violence and forced marriages.

Further, lived justice, achievable through land, builds on transformative justice literature that advocates for transitional justice that is more transformative (Baines and Oliveira 2020; Goodmark 2015; Gready and Robinsy 2014). For example, ‘transformative justice is concerned with creating and empowering communities, defined not through traditional institutions, but by people subjected to abuse’ (Goodmark 2015, 725). In this case, women subjected to forced marriage and sexual violence defined land as justice. Owning and accessing land will transform the harm suffered by giving spaces in which they can raise children born of the harm. Similarly, a study with women in Acholi illustrated a transformative justice approach where women secure the future of their children by engaging combatants, community leaders and survivors to trace the roots of their children born of forced marriage (Baines and Oliveira 2020). One aspect of
securing the future involves the child accessing land in their paternal homes, addressing the sense of belonging, sense of home, and the “nephew problem” (Whyte and Acio 2017), that women in this study agreed with. Placed-based justice, a concept of lived justice, in this sense advances transformative justice.

To add, it is my interpretation that land gives women security of place and is a foundation for restoring power lost during forced marriage. For example, environmental and natural resources like land, water and mountains are considered protective factors by women survivors of sexual violence (J. N. Clark 2021). It is the absence of these resources worsened by rejection and stigma that led to calls for land as justice. Some participants returned from captivity when their parents had been killed by the rebels or died in the war but in other cases, parents rejected these women, leaving them without land. Owning land gives security of place and home to women. They are not worried about where they will live. For women to have the confidence that they can raise their children born in captivity and the children they continued to have post return, and were rejected by their fathers, they need land. More so, owning land for participants comes with power and regaining a sense of control of their lives. For example, Ms. Angela Atim of Watyer Ki Gen notes, ‘with the multiple children that they have that need land to settle, the mothers feel that for them to live without being harassed, they need land where they could be buried, and their children too, in the future. The mothers need that control. And the control will come when they have where to settle in [land]. Where no one will ever chase them away.’174 Women need to regain that sense of control lost when they were given choices of either death or rape and forced marriage while in captivity. I argue that when women have land, the security of place, sense of control of their lives and guarantees of their children’s futures are achieved. Such a woman may feel confident to end an abusive relationship that was established in violence and survived to-date due to desperation and helplessness. Only relationships established out of love will survive when women become landowners.

174 Key informant interview, Watyer Ki Gen, October 12th, 2019.
However, wife inheritance is a practice connected to land that marginalizes women. *Lawirwodi* noted that if at all, wife inheritance was to have intimacy,175 such a man must court the woman/widow in that family. The experiences of Lapat involved some level of courtship. She was not coerced to accept the man and to relocate to their ancestral land. But this woman accepted wife inheritance so that her children could have land in their paternal home. Women like Lapat may have a better relationship with the brothers of their late husbands because they felt that they were forced to be wives to commanders. I do not claim that these relationships of wife inheritance are perfect because women continue to face stigma and insults from co-wives and in-laws as often, they are taken as second, third or fourth wives in those homes. Still, I argue that the commanders whose relatives inherited these women did so to avoid responsibility of raising the children. For example, some commanders had numerous wives and many children, overwhelming the paternal relatives of rebel commanders who would then have many children to support. Anyadwe was frankly told by her children’s paternal relatives that they wanted her to come and become the mother of all the children of the late LRA commander if she agreed to be inherited by a man, she considered too old. By the men’s relatives inheriting women they are pushing back responsibilities of raising their late brothers’ children to the women who are trying to recover from the harms their sons caused. But inheritance can also be interpreted as paternal families seeking to share responsibilities of raising their children born in captivity. I further assert that wife inheritance is a continuation of abduction, sexual violence and forced marriage given that the primary relationship to members of these clans started in war.

Further, apart from my friend married in Nwoya, the two participants who accepted to be inherited as wives in hopes of accessing land are not getting it, a situation exacerbated by the fact they have not been formally married in those clans. They are cohabiting176 with their late husband’s brothers. That is why I see it as a continuation of forced marriage that started in captivity. Since land was a driving factor for wife inheritance, when women can own land and gain other senses of justice like needs-based, they may reconsider their decision to accept wife inheritance. Like women who reunited with former commanders due to poverty, rejection, 175

175 Such as involvement in sexual activities.
176 A common-law relationship without formal marriages.
children’s identity, and merciful love discussed in Chapter Four, women who have been inherited as wives would not do so if their senses of justice as lived were met. Wife inheritance, while rare in Acholi, still happens to participants like Lapat as women are searching for place-based justice that allows them and their children to have a home to live, a route to lived justice. But agency was shown by women who refused to be inherited. While those who were inherited also have agency, they could not exercise it due to poverty and rejection.

Lastly, the “nephew problem” defined as ‘the challenges faced by sons of women who left their husbands and returned to their original home with their children (Whyte and Acio 2017, 28)’ has pushed mothers to reunite or accept wife inheritance so that their children can have an identity and land to live on. These authors found that young women feel insecure compared to men in accessing their father’s land. This feeling, according to them is based on the view that if daughters were allocated shares of clan land, it would end up in the possession of their husbands from other clans. Relatively, a study reported that women’s land claims in Acholi as daughters, widows and sisters were not often respected by clan elders and families (Hopwood 2015). As mentioned in Chapter Two, my cousin brother attempted to evict my mother from our ancestral lands since the passing of my father in 2004. As a daughter of a widow with very small land my family defended, I decided to buy farmland in my own village to secure my identity that is inseparable from land. But not every woman has the resources to buy land, hence the justification of defining land as justice by participants. Still, the “nephew problem” and challenges around women’s access to land is not only experienced by survivors of forced marriage, but women and children in Acholi, although the level for the abducted is higher, exacerbated by stigma.

To end, the high rate of commercialization of land in Acholi leaves women like Larem and their children born in captivity behind, because the costs of land make it inaccessible to them who can’t afford it, one of the reasons they defined their justice in this sense. Having been denied education through abduction, women are unable to get highly paid employment to buy land that is one of the most expensive assets in Northern Uganda. Yet land remains the only asset Acholi people have after the war. Women and their children born of war find themselves trapped in these challenges in the aftermath of a war they survived. A society that was once knit together,
that valued community is being broken apart due to land greed, social stigma, interfamily conflicts, and poverty.

As the chapter presented, participants want place-based justice that can be achieved by apportioning to them land to own. Their calls for land depended on assertions that land is home, land is identity for them, and their children, informed by Acholi spiritual connection to land and one’s ancestors, land is a place for economic livelihood activities, and land is an asset that will give them security and contribute to their healing from wartime sexual violence and forced marriage. Senses of home in the women’s case goes beyond physical ownership of land given it has elements of permanence, a place to be rooted, to belong, to be peaceful and nourish one’s inner being without the threat of social stigma, further violence, and homelessness. Besides land, I turn to compensation-based and needs-based justice in the next chapter.
Chapter 6: ‘Just Pay Us’: Compensation-Based and Needs-Based Justice

6.1 Introduction: Moo Ka Oton I Cip Pe Nange

*Moo ka oton I cip pe nange* is an Acholi saying that directly translates as ‘once oil drops in *cip* (on the ground), it cannot be licked or used again.’ This reflects the impossibility of full restoration or restitution of one’s life following an egregious harm. For example, not all oil that is spilled can be put back in a bottle as some will remain to be cleaned from the place it spilled. In discussing compensation as a sense of justice and what they want to be compensated for, the women often used this saying to reflect on their situation. The majority of women said they want to be compensated for suffering endured in the bush (*can ma wa deno ilum*), for time lost in abduction (*kare wa ma obale I amak*) and for life wasted in captivity (*kwo wa ma obale I amak*). By these demands, women seek compensation from the state for suffering endured following their abduction and hold the state accountable for failure in its responsibility to protect. Compensation in this sense is a form of symbolic recognition for harm women endured and the cumulative impact of this harm that remains in their lives years after abduction. This understanding of compensation extends beyond current transitional justice scholarship and programs that advocate for compensation for sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), a legally defined, and temporally bound definition of harm.

Further and importantly, the women state that, to be compensated for conflict related sexual violence alone results only in further stigmatization. Rather, women asked to be paid for suffering and “time lost” in abduction without the labels of “rape” or “rebel wife.” Below, I quote Lanyero who spoke to the impossibility of full restoration:

> In Acholi there is a saying that *moo ka oton I cip pe nange*. It means that, so many years have passed, and you could have been somebody by now but by prosecuting someone who did this to me, will it take me back to those years to pursue my dreams the way I was supposed to if I was not abducted? No. And will reparations or restoration? No. You can never be restored. I cannot become a girl again. You see, I am almost clocking 40 (years). So, it cannot take me back to that youthful age where I am going to get a man, the love of
...my life, and my dream job. What I want now is...I am trying to make my life better, for my life to continue. That is my justice. 177

The father of Lanyero’s child was granted blanket amnesty, he reportedly earns a monthly salary from the government army but does not give any child support. Lanyero is aware that all her lost youthful years cannot be recovered when she says, ‘I cannot become a girl again,’ but compensation can contribute to her and other women’s abilities to live lives of dignity going forward.

This chapter discusses two senses of justice that are deeply connected: compensation-based justice and needs-based justice. Participants reasoned that compensation addresses the justice expectations related to recognition of ongoing harm178 due to government’s failure to protect, while needs-based justice responds to the senses of justice related to women desiring to live lives of dignity enabled by their abilities to meet everyday basic needs such as housing, children’s education, and medical treatment. Still, a comprehensive reparations program that includes compensation can address senses of justice as needs-based. Nyakoker articulates this connection:

For justice to happen, compensation should be given. Compensation is all we want...Justice is compensation. .....They should just compensate us. We have been talking about this compensation for a while now. As for me Nayakoker, there is nothing else I want apart from money. I don’t want the issue of health care card because government might say [Gulu Regional Referral] hospital is there [to give medical treatment]. They should just pay us money and you decide what you want to do with the money, be it buying land, paying children’s school fees, or eating whatever food. It is hard to say the amount. But it could be a yearly payment.179

The chapter argues that demands for compensation for time lost and needs-based justice are acts of refusal to accept the terms of living with stigma following their abduction, and denial of opportunity and fulfillment of basic human needs. Women stated that they do not seek compensation from the fathers of their children who the state also failed to protect: most men

177 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, Aug 31st, 2019.
178 These continuing harms are social stigma, lack of housing and economic abilities to raise children born of forced marriage that women would have been protected from in the first place.
179 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 31st, 2019.
were abducted as they were. They do want the men to assume responsibility for their children’s basic needs, but they do not hold them accountable for failure to protect them and the suffering that resulted from ongoing lack of recognition and compensation from the state. The chapter has two sections that discusses compensation-based justice in the first part and needs-based justice in the second part. I conclude it with a discussion on these two senses of justice that intersect with place-based and relationship-based justice to bring about lived justice.

6.2 ‘I Cannot Become a Girl Again’: Compensation-Based Justice

Compensation is a significant call for repairing harm women endured. A study noted that compensation enables victims to gain access to social, health, and legal services (Roman and Choi 2009). Most women defined their sense of justice as dependant on compensation from the government arguing that it will allow them to heal and enable their ability to meet basic needs as they live their lives post abduction. In this section, I elaborate further on what participants asked to be compensated for, how they reasoned that compensation is justice, healing, and who has the responsibility to compensate.

6.2.1 Compensation for What?

Participants argued that they want the state to compensate them for time lost in abduction, suffering endured and its cumulative effects on their lives. The quotes below illustrate the significance of time lost, and trauma endured as they relate to demands for compensation from government:

They must pay us….war victims must be paid for the trauma they went through.....If you are to calculate the days, months and years wasted in captivity, the money is big enough to change our lives and at least help us. They should at least do something for us because we wasted a lot of our lives and time in the bush.\(^{180}\)

The government [from whom] we were taken should pay us for all our lives wasted in captivity. They should renew our lives….Because what we went through is like a wound

\(^{180}\)Focus group discussion, Awach Sub-County, September 13\(^{th}\), 2019
in our hearts. For example, if I came back and found my colleague who I was [performing] better than in school before I got abducted is now a doctor, it would break my heart so badly. So, the government should empower and compensate me for my life wasted in captivity so that we can get psychological healing.\textsuperscript{181}

Time is of the essence when it comes to life and compensation as the above quotes show. But also pain and suffering are at the bottom of this lost time. It is not only time wasted as participants put it, but also, a long-time of enduring pain and suffering which some participants believe could have been stopped by the government. I discuss the government’s responsibility to protect as connected to demands for relationship-based justice in the next chapter. But women’s repeated calls to be compensated for time lost, life wasted, shattered professional dreams and suffering illustrates that addressing violence and understanding women’s senses of justice goes beyond the impact of violence itself on life because time lost cannot be fully recovered. Full restoration to a life before abduction is impossible, the reason women felt the saying mo ka oton I cip pe nange best captures their situation. I quote the Director of Gulu Women’s Economic Development and Globalization (GWEDG) who concurred with the women:

We need to look at her [the girl] before she was abducted. That she was a woman who was probably trekking to school. A young girl who was abused but before, she had a dream. She wanted to be a doctor. She wanted to be a nurse. She wanted to be a teacher… That was her before the war. Remember everybody who was abducted, they were abducted when they were in school or even in community with certain ambitions in life. Now this ambition went to the bush and was killed, and she was rebranded somebody else. On returning, we forget that she comes from a background where she wanted to be somebody and that she was abducted not on her own will. That means that when she needs to be [given] reparation, we need to find out at what level is this person?\textsuperscript{182}

The call for compensation of suffering contributes to the literature presented in Chapter One on naming of harm. For example, several studies found that survivors of wartime forced marriage may or may not agree with the characterization of their experience as slavery, forced marriage and sexual slavery (Bunting, Lawrance, and Roberts 2016; Oosterveld 2011). Bunting and Quirk

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{181} Storytelling circle, Gulu town, October 11\textsuperscript{th}, 2019
\textsuperscript{182} Interview with Director of GWEDG, Gulu town, October 7\textsuperscript{th}, 2019.
\end{flushleft}
(2017) noted that the designation of wife was harmful to women in Northern Uganda but it did not fit the common understanding of sexual violence crimes. Mibenge (2013) noted that women practice agency in societal institutions like marriage, despite its depiction as a harsh tradition for women. Women’s demand for compensation for time lost and suffering are acts of agency and contests rights-based labels of harm such as rape that affect them and their children born of it. Women’s narratives demonstrate the cumulative effects of abduction, beyond the violence of SGBV that they do not name as a point of compensation. Rather, women want to be compensated for suffering connected to their entire abduction experience. This goes beyond the limited nature of transitional justice approaches that centre on the harm of SGBV. To women, the cumulative effect of harm and desiring to live lives they dreamt of as little girls now is what underscores their demands for compensation-based justice.

6.2.2 Compensation is Justice

Results from this study indicate that compensation is a form of justice. Compensation is one of the paths to lived justice. It enables access to other senses of justice that I discussed in this dissertation. Compensation is an element of formal reparations in transitional justice literature usually given to victims as material or symbolic payments individually or communally (Rubio-Marin and de Greiff 2007; Walker 2016; Scanlon and Muddell 2010). However, women in this study defined compensation in this sense, as a payment or replacement for their loss and pain. For example, participants articulated that if they are compensated by the government, they will be able to purchase land that achieves their senses of place-based justice. That is on the assumption that compensation will be monetary. However, if it were tangible compensation, such as giving the women land, education scholarships for their children and livelihoods initiatives, these would also enable the achievement of place-based justice, needs-based justice and restore hope for future lives of dignity. Compensation can also contribute to the achievement of relationship-based justice because women have connected their demands for compensation to the government’s acknowledgment of failure to protect them from being abducted and official apology. Further, compensation is perceived as a sense of recognition and acknowledgement of suffering from the government, and a recognition of government’s failure to protect women from
abduction. Women’s victimhood and apology are discussed in Chapter Seven. I argue that verbal formal statements from government representatives may be perceived as empty by women if they do not involve compensation.

Further, one woman notes, ‘I would feel that justice is served if I am paid for the horror and suffering that I went through in captivity. If done, then that would bring me peace and ease my life.’\(^{183}\) This participant introduces a concept of peace that she can find through compensation. Her justice is tied to peacefulness and satisfaction. But the peace is dependent on a sense of justice. She wants to feel and live this justice through compensation before she can experience inner peace. To add, another woman narrates:

For justice to be served, they must compensate us for the pain we went through, and they give us something for all the wrong things that were done to us. For example, people get accidents, and the president compensates them immediately. But our issue, ever since we came back [from captivity], the president does not even think about us, yet he was the

\(^{183}\) Focus group discussion, Awach Sub-County, Gulu district, Sep 13\(^{th}\), 2019
one that made us get abducted because if he had protected us well [enough] the LRA wouldn’t have abducted us. So, it was his fault that we got abducted.\textsuperscript{184}

The Chairperson of WAN, who went through the same experience as participants in this study, drew the connection between peace and reparation that is achievable through compensation. However, senses of justice as compensation-based, place-based, relationship-based, and needs-based are elements of reparations that aim at transforming women’s lives post abduction. Senses of justice that not only centre on their experience of SGBV but their overall suffering compounded by everything like education, time, opportunities to access and own property that were lost during abduction years. Yet the government has been reluctant to deliver reparations. To Evelyn Amony, the government is taking advantage of women’s lack of formal education to avoid paying compensation.

These things link back to reparation because for one’s heart to be at peace, something must have been done for you that will help you to be like the people who have been at home. When you look closely, most of the former captives are uneducated and I think the government does not feel challenged by them because they are illiterate but if they were educated the government would have been challenged to ensure that justice was served. For justice to be served, they must hear from both sides about what caused the war, and the culprits must answer for their actions by giving a valid explanation as to why they did what they did.\textsuperscript{185}

\textbf{6.2.3 Compensation is Healing}

Compensation-based justice also involves healing. Many participants spoke about healing as something they will experience if they get compensation reasoning that it will heal their hearts. Healing of hearts is usually expressed in Acholi as \textit{kweyo cwiny}. \textit{Kweyo cwiny} directly translates as ‘cooling of hearts.’ Participants commonly used the phrase \textit{kweyo cwiny} as something they will experience when the government compensates them. \textit{Kweyo cwiny} has been reported in a study my colleagues and I did with war-affected communities in northern Uganda arguing that knowing the truth about what happened and why the war was fought would heal their hearts

\textsuperscript{184} Storytelling circle, Gulu town, October 11\textsuperscript{th}, 2019
\textsuperscript{185} Interview with Chairperson Women’s Advocacy Network, Gulu town, October 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 2019
(Anyeko et al. 2012). *Cwer cwiny* (anger that causes heartache or heart pain) is the opposite of this feeling that women expressed as a disappointment for no justice and reparation from the government since they escaped rebel abduction and returned home, and pain endured in captivity. For example, Nyakoker and Anyadwe respectively note:

> We just need compensation so that the wounds in our hearts may heal, so that we are able to raise the children we returned with, for our hearts to cool. We need to also raise the children we had from home too.186

> Whether or not government is sued, it needs to compensate us. Take for example, the elderly, government is paying them monthly about 20,000/= [$8 CND]. What about us who are just here? As someone said earlier, *moo ka oton I cip pe nange*. Still, it can at least *kweyo cwinywa* to a certain level even if it won’t solve everything.187

*Olo too kweyo cwinywa* (it cools our hearts to some extent), women argued. *Kweyo cwiny* is an Acholi concept that describes a feeling or an act that takes place after a wrong has been committed or pain experienced where the wrong doer or their associates are responsible for taking actions to cool the hearts of survivors. In the event of pain associated with death of a loved one due to diseases, unknown circumstances or other causes, neighbours, relatives, and communities convene to *kweyo cwiny* of the bereaved family. It is the experience associated with what follows harm or loss or pain for recovery of the affected person or group. Compensation has that cooling effect because it is a form of recognition of women’s pain that helps them raise their children who have been abandoned by their fathers. As one woman noted, ‘the government should organize payment for us so that our hearts could be with peace. Things happen but if there is no cooling of the heart, then it makes life hard.’188 And according to Nyapolo:

> I think what could be done to remove what happened to us in the past is that the government should do something for us. For example, giving us some kind of payment for the horror we went through in captivity.189

186 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 31st, 2019
187 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 31st, 2019
188 Focus group discussion, Awach Sub-County, Gulu district, September 13th, 2019
189 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 23rd, 2019
Most participants directed their plea for compensation to the government as I discuss in the next sub section but also, they are disappointed that they have pled for this kind of justice for far too long. Langec has been home for eighteen years since returning from captivity and nothing has happened. She had this to say:

All the places where war happened, where bombs were unleashed, there would be compensation to cool people’s hearts but ours is a little bit different. Even if we want justice, we have really cried for this justice for a long time.\textsuperscript{190}

Langec reminds us of how their suffering is compounded by the Ugandan state’s reluctance to address their needs the way other nations do to their citizens that experience violence. As discussed in Chapter Two, with a perception that the Acholi people were fighting fellow Acholi, and that the war was a northern problem, and not a national issue, the political will to address its consequences remains unclear to date, informed by such partisan views from government and those with power to address women’s situations. The government’s reluctance may in part be due to its alleged roles in the war that creates obstacles and a lack of political willingness to address the demands for justice in the form of material compensation as I expand in the next section.

\textbf{6.2.4 The Responsibility to Compensate and Other Significant Issues}

Most participants called upon the Ugandan government as the institution primarily responsible for compensation due to their failure to protect women from abduction. In the words of one woman: ‘the government should compensate us. Indeed, we are also Ugandans. We don’t know how the bush (war) started.’\textsuperscript{191} As discussed in Chapter Two, President Museveni’s takeover of power happened after waging a bush war that led to the overthrow of the previous President Tito Okello Lutwa. This participant is referring to the start of a war that commenced the LRA violence in Northern Uganda in 1986/87. She reclaims victimhood and suffering in a war that women like her never understood. So, responsibility lies with the government. Regardless of how

\textsuperscript{190} Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 31\textsuperscript{st}, 2019
\textsuperscript{191} Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 31\textsuperscript{st}, 2019.
many people are demanding compensation, the women still looked up to the government. For example, ‘however many we are, government needs to pay us even if it is not very big.’ While Lakalatwe notes:

*We were abducted from the presence of the government because they did not protect us. Now that we have returned home from captivity, they were supposed to welcome us, to ease and cool our hearts from all the suffering that we went through in captivity.*

Additionally, participants reasoned that compensation by government will make them feel that they are indeed Ugandans. Women are aware that it is the government’s responsibility to protect its citizens, a principle agreed by Member States including Uganda at the United Nations World Summit in 2005 (United Nations General Assembly 2005). Since protection was not guaranteed, let there be compensation to cool and heal hearts, the women argued. While the majority of participants view government as the primary institution to compensate, they are doubtful whether this will happen due to the fact that most women have already waited for so long. To demonstrate this impossibility, Langec metaphorically refers to ‘crying to the point of flying with wings:’

They [the women] also need support and that support is compensation. That compensation would help you buy land, build a house on it and plant cassava on the same piece. What else would you be looking for if you have that. So, government should have paid us. But there won’t be any compensation even if we cry to the point that we start flying with wings.

Key informants supported the women’s demand for compensation but felt that the government’s good will is key in determining whether it will happen or not. I quote the Archbishop of Gulu Archdiocese who weighed in on several points such as compensation being seen as acceptance and recognition of citizenship:

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192 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 31st, 2019.
194 Langec understands that human beings do not fly but she means that however hard they cry/demand for compensation from the government, even to the point of flying, they may not get it.
195 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 31st, 2019.
Compensation Ketty, that really depends majorly on the good will of the government. The good will of the government is very important in this sense as they should see it as a sign of accepting each of these people as the citizens of this country who have had that misfortune for being abducted against their will. And, as a sign of reparation...the government should look at it as a sign of reparation for not having taken care of them, the security of these people. Because they were snatched from the hands of the government. And the government could not do anything. So, as a sign of reparation, and a sign of saying 'yes it happened but we are sorry for what happened.' Here we shall give you at least symbolically something for your resettlement.\textsuperscript{196}

The issue of too many victims to compensate was raised by women as a possible explanation for government’s reluctance to compensate them. But this was also emphasised by key informants who offered thoughts about compensation. Below, I quote informants who talked about both the government army and the LRA rebels committing atrocities to the people in northern Uganda. This means, not only women need compensation but very many people, and the likelihood that this will happen remains unclear.

The demand for compensation is genuine but I don’t see that happening because we have a government that also took part. And then, when we begin to talk about compensation, the question then becomes, who did what because for us to compensate, we need to know what happened and who did it. Yes, we know the LRA committed a lot of atrocities but when you begin to compensate those who were affected, who were brutalized by the LRA, the other section who were brutalized by the government will also have to be compensated.\textsuperscript{197}

The government should apologize to the former captives. You find that they turn things the other way round. For example, the issue of amnesty, they claim that the former captives rebelled against the government. They may say that they are going to give some compensation to the former captives, but the payment would never come, and it goes silent. It feels like they are not going to pay anyone, people are going to grow old and die without any compensation for their lives that were destroyed. This is because they claim that we rebelled against the government and secondly there are so many victims of the war... It is almost impossible for the government to pay every single person. The government cannot pay all the victims because the government soldiers also killed people

\textsuperscript{196} Interview with His Grace Archbishop John Baptist Odama, Gulu town, October 16\textsuperscript{th}, 2019.
\textsuperscript{197} Interview with Gulu District Chairperson Hon. Ojara Martin Mapenduzi, Gulu town, October 10\textsuperscript{th}, 2019.
and the LRA also killed people in many ways and who would they start compensating first.\textsuperscript{198}

One can assert that it is because of the issues raised above about government’s failure to protect and its alleged role in perpetrating violence in the war that reinforces the demands for compensation. Additionally, the number of victims being too many, among others, likely delayed the approval of the national transitional justice (TJ) policy. The TJ policy took more than seven years to be approved partly because it comes with a cost of reparations to victims from the government. I quote:

Now the TJ policy has been adopted by the cabinet you know…the next phase it should go to parliament but already there are civil society [groups] who are working on the TJ bill to make the TJ [policy] a law. It’s a process that needs to bring the war victims especially from the women’s perspective, youth and children who knew nothing about the war but just found themselves as products of war. Because the concept of reparation and compensation need to come [out] and [should] not be missing in the TJ bill\textsuperscript{199} so that it will become a law and people will be compensated and given reparations. But this is a big fight. That is why the TJ policy has for years not been approved by government because they want to dodge these two perspectives.\textsuperscript{200}

Further, it is crucial to reflect on the position of former LRA commanders who forced women into motherhood when it comes to responsibility and accountability. Most men received blanket amnesties and have abandoned women with the children they fathered. For example, a study of twenty fathers of children born in captivity reported that all fathers had lost contact with their children upon exiting captivity and didn’t make any effort to look for their children (Denov et al. 2019). While a study of sixty children born in captivity found that ninety percent of them live with their biological mothers, nine percent live with a grandmother and one percent lives with their biological fathers (Denov and Lakor 2019, 27). The same study also found that children born in captivity were being deprived food, medical and education needs to the point that some of them attempted suicide. All my years of work in northern Uganda since 2006, I met women

\textsuperscript{198} Women’s rights activist interview, Gulu town, October 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 2019.
\textsuperscript{199} This participant is referring to the Uganda’s transitional justice policy that was approved in 2019. It is pending to be passed as a bill in Parliament.
\textsuperscript{200} Interview with Director of GWEDG, Pamela Angwech, Gulu town, October 7\textsuperscript{th}, 2019.
who were struggling with their children singlehandedly and complained about their fathers earning salaries but neglected their children. Several women came to my office at the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRPA) when I worked as a gender justice team leader asking for support to access basic needs like school fees or housing as their children’s fathers were not giving any child support. Even if some women recommended men be interviewed as they are also suffering because of their abduction, most of them view the men as unwilling to support their children. According to the Chairperson of WAN:

These men are alive, but their children are suffering. These men are lazy and are used to free things, and things being done for them like it used to be in captivity. They do not realize that the ranks they had in captivity remained there when they left and out here, they are all civilians with equal responsibilities. They always want to sit and wait for things but out here, they will wait forever. For example, there is a man who brought his rules from the bush back home here. He tells the wife to give magadi [baking soda] to his child whenever the child is sick because back in captivity it was used as medicine since we had limited access to pharmaceutical drugs.\(^{201}\)

In a related scenario, Lagen reunited with the father of her child but two years later he was arrested and spent nine years in prison. She waited for him until his release, but it was not long before he got arrested again. So, she left him due to his repeated arrests. For the first few occasions, he convinced his wife that the accusations were untrue, but it got worse when he was locked behind bars in Luzira prison after stealing a motorbike. Lagen narrates:

He kept denying when I asked him. We continued staying together but I saw life with him was not making any sense. I warned him about the friend he was hanging out with, but he never listened to me. The friend was a renowned thief and warned him that he would get himself killed if he continued with such bad company. It all fell on deaf ears. I got tired of that and called my people to come and take me home. I had persevered nine years without him and that was how he continued to live. My family came and took me with them. When I was living with my mother, I got the news that he was again arrested and taken to Luzira prison. And up to now he is still there. That was how we separated.\(^{202}\)

\(^{201}\) Interview with Chairperson, Women’s Advocacy Network, Gulu town, October 3\(^{rd}\), 2019.

\(^{202}\) Focus group discussion, Gulu town, Aug 23\(^{rd}\), 2019.
These examples show the challenges related to former LRA commanders that participants face after returning home, let alone the violence, and suffering they endured while still in captivity. Some men who left the LRA re-enlisted in the government army and rejected their children. But others remained in the bush fighting or died before participants returned home with their children. Two former LRA commanders, Ongwen and Kwoyelo have been undergoing legal prosecutions. Ongwen was convicted by the ICC for war crimes and crimes against humanity including forced marriage and forced pregnancy in February 2021. Neglect or absence of fathers of the women’s children, and the poverty that results, are driving factors for the women seeking compensation. Arjun Appadurai (2004, 64) notes ‘poverty involves material deprivation and desperation, lack of security and dignity, exposure to risks and high costs and inequality materialized.’ Appadurai (2004, 66) continues to say that, ‘the poor are frequently in a position where they are encouraged to subscribe to norms whose social effect is to further diminish their dignity, exacerbate their inequality, and deepen their lack of access to material goods and services.’ Such is the case with women in this study, who trace the causes of their present economic impoverishment and suffering to the state. Their stigmatization and marginalization on return is amplified by the fact that the majority of father’s are unable or unwilling to assume responsibility. Yet in a patriarchal society, such support is critical to economic and social security.

As seen from Chapters Four and Five, women found themselves in consequent failing marriages in attempts to keep up with the pressure to be married and have their children’s basic needs met by their husbands. Women exposed themselves to risks like getting infected with HIV-AIDS, domestic violence and gave birth to more children that were neglected by their fathers, further adding the burden of raising children singlehandedly. Arguably, the failure of former LRA commanders to provide for their children due to their perceived inability given they were impacted by the war as well or their enjoyment of impunity amount to senses of injustice. Because men forced women into wartime “marriages” whether they were abducted themselves or not, and the government and community members failed to protect them, expectations of
compensation are desirable from the state. But, women still demand child support from men as a form of accountability but at the same time do not see the potential of poor former LRA commanders to compensate, hence turning to the government who had the primary responsibility to protect both women and men from the LRA. Further, while calls for compensation is directed to the government, women emphasized the need for the men who fathered their children, or their relatives if they have died, be held accountable to their parental responsibilities including provision of basic needs like education, land, housing, and medical treatment. These demands were not defined as compensation-based justice by participants; but the women’s desire for fathers to assume responsibility for their children’s basic needs can be understood within the expectations of needs-based justice, as below.

In this sub section I have argued that demands for compensation from the government is due to its failure to protect the women from being abducted, for life opportunities and time lost while in abduction. These demands are less traumatizing for both mothers and their children born of wartime sexual violence, and an act of refusal to be defined by their past traumatic experiences that remain visible in their lives today. The refusal to be defined by sexually violent experiences is demonstrated in the women’s anger towards lack of redress for the consequences of harm endured and underscores their demands for compensation as something that will cool their hearts. Despite the achievability of compensation-based justice being unclear given the government’s lack of political will or financial inability to do so, results indicate that compensation is a sense of justice that survivors of wartime sexual violence and forced marriage need. Participants stated that they need compensation from the state to feel recognised, and for their lives to be peaceful even if it cannot be fully restored.

In community outreaches I organized in Northern Uganda between 2006 and 2012, women reminded the community members that they should not stigmatise them because they too failed to prevent their abduction. Women perceive communities as victims of the war who also needed protection from the government, thereby viewing the government as the one responsible for giving compensation and needs-based justice.

When I worked as a volunteer with Norwegian refugee Council between 2001 and 2004, I saw semi-permanent houses reportedly constructed by World Vision in the IDP camps in northern Uganda for women who returned from the LRA. I recall the community member walking us through the camp referring to the house as belonging to a former “rebel wife.” It is this stigmatizing label women are refusing.
6.3 ‘Prosecution Will Not Solve My Problems’: Needs-Based Justice

In response to the question of what justice is for women, everyday needs were regularly articulated including school fees for children, decent and permanent housing, employment, and health care, among others. The framework of lived justice that this study develops provides an understanding of women’s desire to have these daily life needs met. Justice, for them, is an enhanced ability to meet these needs, which I termed needs-based justice. I argue that being able to meet basic needs allows women live lives of dignity and restores a sense of worthiness that had been destroyed by experiences of wartime forced marriage and sexual violence. To be able to live in a decent house, educate your children, feed, and treat your family when they are sick makes one feel at par with fellow humans, consequently cooling the women’s hearts.

If women were not abducted, they would have acquired employable skills through education and the ability to meet their needs. Since government did not prevent their abduction which ultimately ruined these opportunities, women perceive justice as an enhanced ability to afford decent lives and live a life close to what their dreams and aspirations were when they were little girls before abduction, hence the concept of needs-based justice. This sense of justice can also be achieved if women’s suffering is recognised through compensation, discussed in the previous section. A comprehensive compensation package can address women’s suffering, but it may not
wholly restore their lives. Still, it has a symbolic relevance because it recognises women’s suffering by paying for lost years in abduction. Like compensation, the calls for needs-based justice were directed to the government but some participants demanded that the fathers of their children be held accountable in meeting these needs as well.

In 2014, the Women’s Advocacy Network, whose members participated in this study, were accompanied by civil society organizations, traditional and religious leaders among others, to present a petition to Ugandan Parliament for reparations, demand compensation and other kinds of recognition and support in raising children born of forced marriages. But to date, nothing has happened despite government’s promise to act. Through such petitions, women are seeking compensation and needs-based justice. I quote His Grace Archbishop John Baptist Odama who accompanied the women in Parliament and reflected on women’s calls for land, compensation, and basic needs:

There could be a special, you can call it affirmative action, to get these women to have their children educated….. Even if they [government] may not have anything locally in their hands, they can appeal to other governments so that they make a national budget that is supplemented by outside governments. They could request this [money] specifically for this. And there is need to have accurate statistics to do something of that kind. Or give something as a sign of compensation for the communities where these people are, like medical treatment for example. The government could say ‘we take these in our hands’, or you go to a government hospital, but they should have an identification through which they can be recognised and treated through some special attention. Those are the opportunities. It can be done. It is only as I mentioned that the good will of the government that is missing. And then the MPs could advocate for this as well. We have had some attempts of our group of the Acholi Religious Leaders. We tried to plead for the course of these women and even men who came back and are in desperate need. We tried to appeal. We even one time escorted these women who have come back [from captivity] up to the Parliament.205

The archbishop’s statement makes the connection between compensation and the needs women articulated as justice. His view on affirmative action206 for education of women’s children is

205 Interview with His Grace Archbishop John Baptist Odama, Gulu town, October 16th, 2019
206 Affirmative action involves policy initiatives put in place by government or companies to prioritize marginalised members of society to benefit from services like education or employment opportunities (see
important to addressing the women’s desire to live dignified lives and be at par with other human beings. Affirmative action can lead to equity between the women and those who were not abducted, allowing everyone to access education. Another aspect that goes beyond the impossibility of compensating everyone is community compensation through provision of comprehensive medical services where both women and their communities benefit from such initiatives from the government. This addresses women’s calls for senses of justice connected to medical support but at the same time, can be a tool to minimise stigma and blame from the communities towards the women if they all benefit from a communal compensation scheme like a hospital or a well-equipped government-run medical facility.

My background of working with these women as a researcher, mentor, funder and now as a scholar allows me to interpret and understand women’s senses of justice from these various positions. For example, as I worked in northern Uganda, I sometimes thought that inability to meet these basic needs and poverty were the obstacles to women’s pursuit of legal justice. It was on this basis that a grant-making organization I worked with funded an NGO in Gulu to provide livelihood support to women so that an improved level of income in their households would allow them enough time to pursue legal justice. But our assumptions as funders were inadequate as results from my dissertation offered new perspectives to justice. Women’s calls for an enhanced ability to meet their basic needs is beyond what I had seen when I worked as a funder. Not having time or resources are not the only reasons why women do not pursue legal justice, they are also reluctant because they do not trust the system due to corruption, inefficiencies, slowness, stigma, and burden of providing evidence of SGBV harm, and don’t see it as significant to their immediate recovery and improvement of their lives. They have preference to secure their children’s education, land, housing, jobs, and economic livelihood. I quote Lanyero:

I see that justice is stability for me to support myself because even if someone is prosecuted, it will not restore my life. I just want my future. I want a good job that can

https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/definition/affirmative-action). Key in the definition of affirmative action is the recognition that these members have been discriminated and for this reason require a special framework to give them the opportunities others have.
support myself and my family. That is all... If I am employed and I can support my family, I think that is justice for me. Prosecution will not solve my problems.  

Lanyero wants to have a stable future life where she can afford to take care of her family. She needs stable employment so that she doesn’t have to worry about her family’s needs and can live a life of dignity. Most participants argued that if compensation is given, they would be able to meet their basic needs. But their calls for enhanced ability to meet basic needs, termed needs-based justice, has been articulated as a separate form of justice by many participants who did not refer to compensation that I present below.

6.3.1 Children’s Education

The number one need women expressed when asked what their senses of justice were, was school fees for their children born in captivity. In Chapter Four, I discussed how some women reunited with the fathers of their children specifically to have them pay school fees and other needs like land and housing. But even those who reunited still struggle on their own and find education for their children unaffordable. This is because many of their children born in captivity have grown into teenagers who need to go to university yet tuition at most post-secondary institutions is unaffordable for not only these women, but many Ugandans. Education equates to better job opportunities. In Larem’s words:

The issue of education, as I speak, my son is sitting for senior six and he is going to the hard part that I cannot handle. That is the university because when a child studies a certain subject in school then he must do that subject at the university for them to get a job in the future. So, if they do not go to the university then it’s almost like your child did not study. I am only requesting for my one son, if anyone could help me pay for my son through the university so that he could finish and help his younger brothers and sisters and that’s all I request for.  

Similarly, when asked what her sense of justice was, Nyapolo’s response was ‘paying school fees for our children because, we, former captives did not study so we do not have transcripts

207 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 31st, 2019.
that can get us jobs. Education will contribute to improving the lives of mothers as they have hopes in their children to support them when they build good careers. As Lagum put it:

I am praying for my children to study and go to higher levels of education because I believe that when they study, my life will change and one thing I know for sure is that, out of my six children, if they all study and have something to do, they will not neglect me. This is what I pray for every day, and I don’t want them to be called drunkards.

Likewise, some mothers cited education as key to their senses of justice because their children’s education brings satisfaction. I discussed earlier that women want to be compensated for missed opportunities, shattered dreams, dreams to become a doctor or a teacher. Dreams that could have only been enabled if they remained in schools studying. Therefore, women reasoned that they would have satisfaction if their children study:

True justice for me is first of all, my time has been wasted, and for me to agree that true justice has happened even if it won’t go back to the way it should have been, I should be supported and empowered to a certain level. That way I [will] feel justice has happened. I know that nothing can be restored fully to its original state....I will no longer be able to study as I already have children. My children that I returned with from the bush should be given education opportunities in terms of paying my children at school because for me now I am vulnerable, my life is already wasted. And as a mother, I should also be empowered by giving me some money to boost my business …. If it is done that way, it would mean true justice for me.

They [government] should have started at least a programme of paying the children that returned from captivity because if they pay them in school, it would be like they have paid us the mothers. Our education was cut short, and we do not know anything. When one is educated, he or she would “walk among others with their heads high” but if they are not educated, all the time you are with people you just nod your head down because you fear people may abuse you.

Laber (see top quote), spoke about both education for her children and economic empowerment for herself so that she can meet other needs of her family. That is her definition of justice. As a

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209 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 23rd, 2019.
210 Oral history interview, Gulu town, October 17th, 2019.
211 Oral history interview, Gulu town, September 11th, 2019.
212 Focus group discussion, Awach Sub-County, Gulu district, September 13th, 2019.
matter of fact, the issue of school fees was one of the most pressing needs women who showed up to my office when I worked in Gulu always wanted. It is one of the most voiced needs from the women that I heard through all my years of work in Uganda. To demonstrate, it is the pain of not being able to afford good education for their children that causes heartache to mothers as much as the experience of harm itself. I quote: ‘the issue of school fees for our children are very important to me and it’s what gives me endless heartache. Our lives were wasted in captivity, and we are illiterate and there is nothing we can do.’

Further, women want education for their children as justice because it comes with pride and can be a weapon against stigma and name calling. If their children are educated, it will contribute to shutting negative perceptions people have about them and address their fears about children turning violent and causing instability as they become adults in future. According to Lagum and Nyapolo:

They are very aware that they were born while in captivity that is why I really advised them to study hard because in Uganda if you study, you can have a good name and since the communities do not call us good names, they can make all that go away in the future after studying hard.

My major worry is about the children we came with from captivity. Due to poverty and no assistance from the government to help them build their lives and become better citizens, poverty may make these children again turn out to be rebels in the future if the situation is not addressed. When the children start stealing from the community, isn’t that now rebel behaviours? People should be aware of the rise of a new rebel group if these issues are not addressed. These children may go back into the bush because of the hard life they are living out here.

Lastly, results show that children’s education is the future for many mothers. This finding is similar to a study that reported that children born in captivity wanted to study so as to counter stigma and take care of their mothers in future (Denov and Lakor 2019). Likewise, participants see their children as their futures, the reason their senses of justice are connected to needs, place,
and relationships for a good future for them and their children. For example, I quote three participants in Awach:216 ‘I don’t know if my future is going to be well because if my child fails to continue with school, then my future could be over. If my child could go further with studies, then I know that at least it would push us forward in life. But the way I see things now, my future is not bright.’ Similarly, ‘I thought when I grow up, my future would be bright but now, I am looking at my children [and] I see my future is not clear.’ Also, ‘my future is there because the children I gave birth to, are my future. Whether you are educated or not, your children are your future.’ Besides education, women need their livelihood’s ability to be enhanced.

6.3.2 Sustainable Economic Livelihoods

Findings from this study indicate that participants need stable sources of livelihood and employment. They specifically asked government and well-wishers to give them business skills training and start-up capital for various economic activities like crop farming, animal rearing, and small-scale businesses. These livelihoods, according to participants, will enhance their ability to feed their children and meet other basic needs of their family members. For example, Lapat and Lamaro respectively note:

Justice can be a way of giving some support to the mothers who returned from the bush to start life anew, become stronger and support the children they have. For justice to be felt, government should put the women down and ask them ‘what can we do to strengthen your life?’ But now, they have left the women just like that. There is nothing.217

For you to live an easy life, you need money in your hands. If you have money, your life is better, and your friends even start coming back to you. In my view, I wish the government could give us hands-on tools like oxen and ox-ploughs. If we are given these things, it will be good. There is a better harvest when you use ox-plough to farm compared to when you use hoes. That is where my request is. These days in the villages, you are doing good and in a high standard [of life] if you have oxen, ox-ploughs, and a motor bike. You will be respected. They [community] won’t look down on you.218

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216 Focus group discussion, Awach Sub-County, Gulu district, September 13th, 2019.
217 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 31st, 2019.
218 Women’s initial workshop, Gulu town, August 20th, 2019.
The above quotes draw links between being economically empowered, earning respect and improvement in relationships. For women who have faced rejection and social stigma from most circles in their lives, things\textsuperscript{219} that improve their relationships with those around them amount to justice. In this case, having money, hands-on farming tools and other kinds of property are key to empowering women economically while also improving relationships. I discussed land as a source of livelihood in the previous chapter. If not land, women asked for business skills training and start-up capital as things that will improve their incomes and ability to meet their basic needs. I quote:

If they [government] could make some effort to take us to technical schools so that we acquire some skills. And, if they could give us some money to start doing business to help us move forward with life.\textsuperscript{220}

They [government] should also get for us something to do to help us move forward with life because we have a lot of difficulties looking for money, we can grow crops, but the challenge is, we lack land for cultivation. If they would give us some capital for starting small businesses to help us start our lives and move forward.\textsuperscript{221}

Some participants were given skills training by reception centres when they had just returned from rebel captivity. These centres gave women and men who were economically trained with skills in tailoring, hair dressing, running small businesses and other skills, start-up kits or capital in equipment forms.\textsuperscript{222} However, not all those who returned home from captivity went through reception centres or benefited from these initiatives. Further, some women who benefited from these trainings and start up kits could not sustainably run the livelihood opportunities arguing that the training was either short or they had difficulty grasping the skills and could not get markets once the training was over. I quote:

I went and studied tailoring for nine months from World Vision and we came back home with a sewing machine given to us by the World Vision. But still, I had little knowledge

\textsuperscript{219} These include land, housing, children’s education, health, and food.
\textsuperscript{220} Focus group discussion, Awach Sub-County, Gulu district, September 13\textsuperscript{th}, 2019.
\textsuperscript{221} Focus group discussion, Awach Sub-County, Gulu district, September 13\textsuperscript{th}, 2019.
\textsuperscript{222} Equipment was specific to the type of training given. For example, women trained in tailoring were given sewing machines, yarn, threads, fabrics, and other kinds of materials to start such a business.
because while studying tailoring my mind was not settled since I was always worried about what we would eat. Sometimes you even sleep hungry or when you eat from World Vision, that’s all you might have for that day. So, things were so tough, and hard on us.223

6.3.3 Decent and Durable Housing

Another element of needs-based justice that women articulated was the need for decent and durable housing. This finding relates to land as place-based justice presented in the previous chapter because women do not only want land to have a place to call home, but they desire to have descent houses constructed on the land for them to live with their families. Additionally, the need to have and afford decent housing is linked to women’s emphasis on their children’s education. It is a cultural responsibility for children to take care of their aging parents since there are no seniors’ nursing homes in Uganda. Therefore, investing in your child’s education is like securing a better future for yourself as a parent. It’s not a guarantee that all children live up to this expectation as some either abandon their parents or are unable to support them due to unemployment and poverty. For example, ‘I wish for my children to study hard, get jobs so that we can get an iron roofed house. The only thing that hurts me is the fact that I have to make my own house.’224

Acholi society generally constructed their houses using locally made mud brick walls and grass-thatched roofs. These grass-thatched houses called huts are not permanent as with time, the roofs need to be replaced or else, they leak and become weak. In dry seasons, they are also prone to wildfires that can cause loss of property and lives of occupants. Many participants live in these kinds of huts including those in urban centres. Permanent houses with iron roofs are quite expensive and unaffordable for the majority poor, a category under which most participants of the study fall. Having a home to live was expressed by participants as a key component of their sense of needs-based justice. For example, Langec notes:

223 Oral history interview, Gulu town, October 17th, 2019.
224 Women’s initial workshop, Gulu town, August 20th, 2019.
The best thing that the government can do for me is to give [me] money so that I can build my own house. A house that doesn’t get burnt down, a house that does not leak. I have no problems with such a house being built in my father’s land. Even if they buy for me land somewhere else..... I will feel good if I get a house that every year, I don’t have to repair the roof like this one [points to her roof].

Langec lives in a rented hut in Gulu town. Having a permanent house has become the norm and aspiration for most Acholi, and Ugandans. It is the community’s perception that having a decent and permanent house demonstrates that one is successful, living a life of dignity and can afford a certain standard of living. Grass thatched huts are slowly being seen as one which should be left for poultry. The desire for permanent housing mainly came from participants in urban areas and a few from rural areas. So, there is a pressure on those in and around town to build permanent structures instead of grass thatched huts. I quote:

I should leave grass thatched huts and live in an iron roofed house like any other human being. The iron sheets have been made for everyone. I am requesting God that I should also have water on my land so that I don’t go to look for water from somewhere else. I should also have my own transport [means] so that I can move easily to go and farm instead of running to the neighbours for help.

The above participant raises the need for clean water on her land on top of a permanent house. Piped water is scarce and unaffordable for many urban dwellers in Gulu. However, having things like cars remain a luxury for many Ugandans. But in a life mapping exercise with women, the majority drew pictures of permanent brick-made and iron-roofed houses, water tanks, schools, churches, medical centres in the neighbourhood, and cars for ease of transportation among other needs. Those were some things they need and aspire to have for their futures and that of their children to be great. For example: ‘I want the children to live in a good home in the future. A nice home that has a gate, an iron roofed house, a car should also be there in a home.’ Below is a sample life map depicting housing and education needs drawn and discussed by the women:

226 Women’s initial workshop, Gulu town, August 20th, 2019.
227 Women’s initial workshop, Gulu town, August 20th, 2019.
In the life map above, the participant drew her life from the rehabilitation center in Pajule where she lived on arrival from captivity. This was followed by her reunion with her family members who lived in the IDP camp by that time. She also included the event of her leaving the camp for Gulu town where she lived by the time of the study. In her map, she envisons a future home (our future) with a wall fence, and iron-roofed permanet houses that has a school nearby for her children to study.

6.3.4 Medical and Psychosocial Needs

Women also requested for medical and psychosocial needs to be met by the government. Participants noted that many of them survived battles and some of their colleagues still have bullets or weapon splinters in their bodies that require surgery and other kinds of treatment. Some still need psychosocial support through counselling but cannot access these services. They asked to be given some forms of health insurance and issued cards that they and their children can use to access medical treatment in medical facilities. To many mothers, healthy children is a critical need, while others called for a counselling centre to be established for their children:
If at all they could establish a centre for counselling where these children can be counselled and offered advise on how to live their lives better, that would make me very happy so that they can know who they are and where they are going, because these counsellors are not like us the parents. Sometimes we shout over the children, and they don’t do things as we say but the counsellors know how to talk to them.  

Government should know that some people among us have bullets in their bodies, some are HIV positive. Such people should be taken to the hospital for treatment. There should be a kind of health card with which they can use to get medical treatment.

I want good health for my children, and they should go to school because I did not get the chance. Their education is my future and when they finish their education, they could help me in the future.

The identity of participant’s children as “born in captivity” has impacted their daily lives and general health given that they are stigmatized, unable to access education and places to live. For example, a study reported that reintegration programs were inadequate in addressing the specific needs of children born of conflict-related sexual violence (Apio 2007). As Lagum noted, identifying as a child born in captivity is linked to behavioural challenges after returning home. She struggles with her son whom she feels needs counselling in order to acknowledge “who he is” and be better ready for future life. Therefore, this psychosocial need is not only for mothers who expressed them, but also their children who encounter reintegration challenges with stigma, identities and belonging that psychologically affect their wellbeing (see for example Stewart 2020). All in all, the desire for needs-based and compensation-based justice are interrelated because even if compensation primarily meets symbolic recognition desires, needs-based justice, through providing women with the needs discussed above, enables them to live lives they dreamed of when they were little girls. They need a lived form of justice for them and their children. I quote the Director of GWEDG who in her reflections on women’s senses of justice as land, basic needs, and peaceful relationships, noted that prosecution is not the solution to the

228 Oral history interview, Gulu town, October 17th, 2019.
229 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 31st, 2019.
230 Oral history interview, Awach Sub-County, Gulu district, September 13th, 2019.
women’s problems, but compensation and reparation can go a long way in addressing forced marriage and sexual violence.231

What we want is how our livelihood changes with the grievances that we have. How can forgiving Dominic Ongwen better our lives? We even don’t want to be asked about Ongwen because we have our own issues. Are we able to put food on the tables? Are we able to send our children to school? What we want is to feel the results in us as war victims…You get! So, the people said, it’s just this one man’s issue, it cannot take us years and years discussing it while we are still here with our broken bones, with our broken hearts, no healing, we are not…if forgiveness can grant our complete reparation and compensation, we have already done it.232

Further, Arjun Appadurai (2004, 60) notes, ‘economics has become the science of the future, and when human beings are seen as having a future, the key words such as wants, needs, expectations, calculations, have become hardwired into the discourse of economics.’ Appadurai helps us to understand women’s desire to have their children educated so that the children can have better futures, and as women articulated, the children can have employable skills and secure a future for their mothers. Women see their futures and the lives they aspired to live when they were young, in their children, given their aspirations didn’t materialize as desired because they were abducted. I assert that being economically empowered through skills training and start-up capital, offer of compensation symbolically, or monetarily, can contribute to achieving a future close to what women aspired to prior to abduction.

6.4 Conclusion

Compensation-based and needs-based justice that I presented in this chapter contribute to the realization of lived justice. Justice is lived and revolves around the ability to meet every day basic needs and compensating survivors of harm by the state. These senses of justice go beyond two parties of victims and perpetrators and can be conducted alongside other kinds of justice.

231 As covered in Chapter Two, I observed that forgiveness is preferred by war-affected Acholi people over legal prosecutions as they want peace. Even if the trial of LRA commander Ongwen by the ICC brought justice, many remain poor and were reluctant to engage in a process they considered slow in addressing their needs.

232 Interview with Director GWEDG, Gulu town, October 7th, 2019.
Therefore, if survivors of sexual violence and forced marriage demand compensation and basic needs provision, it should not be used to exonerate perpetrators of wrong and encourage impunity. Legal forms of justice can still be pursued alongside a holistic compensation program that enhances women’s abilities to afford their daily living needs. This can be done by giving education scholarships, housing, livelihoods, and medical support for women’s lives to go on. These are their primary senses of justice. The study argues that justice and reparations, that are based on compensation and ability to meet basic needs, allows lived justice to be achieved because education, housing and medical care are everyday human needs. These senses of justice support my overall argument that justice is holistic, relational, and lived in the everyday realms of society.

Additionally, rehabilitation centers did a commendable work in skills training and providing start up kits, but these well-intentioned initiatives had problems with timing. Arguably, this skilling came too early when the women were yet to learn and adjust to the new post-captivity environment. To know what home is, get a sense of their needs, justice, and to recover from abduction trauma. By the time of the research, several sewing machines were packed at women’s homes or sold off long ago. For example, Lagum couldn’t benefit from tailoring despite nine months of training because there was too much for her brain to take in when she just returned from captivity. So, women’s demands for training, business capital and other needs-based components are still relevant. A study noted that reintegration programs were inadequate in focusing at the specific needs of children born of conflict-period sexual violence (Apio 2007) and I would add, their mothers too. Still, even if women’s calls for compensation-based and needs-based justice centre on the wellbeing of their children born of conflict-related sexual violence, the Ugandan government has ‘ignored, resisted, refused, and even denied the very existence of this important population of children’ (Denov and Lakor 2019, 33). Omission of the existence of these children equates to disregarding the pain of wartime sexual violence women endured yet a needs-based and compensatory approach to justice can go a long way in recognition of both women and their children.
Further, the chapter argued that women’s calls for compensation for time lost instead of compensation for sexual violence or forced marriage reduces stigma associated with sexual crimes. It is less traumatizing for both mothers and their children born of the harm, and it is an act of refusal to be defined by their past traumatic experience that remain visible in their lives today. By women asking to be compensated for lost time and opportunities instead of the harm of sexual violence, they are rejecting the stigma, blame and stress associated with being labelled “rebel wives” or “LRA wives”. Imagine a woman is given a house for being a rape victim and everyone points at it while saying that ‘she was given a house because she was raped.’ It’s stigmatizing and traumatizing to the mother. She could have studied, got a good job and built her own house. She wants to be given a house in recognition of and compensation for her lost years in abduction, and to enable her and her children live dignified lives just as she would have earned through her own labour if she was not abducted. It is recommended that reparations, inclusive of compensation programs, do not use labels like rape but rather refer to suffering endured, pain of abduction and lost time when giving material and non-material recognition to women who survived sexual violence in war. To add, wanting to be compensated for time contrasts transitional justice’s (TJ) goal of compensating for harms-sexual violence, rape or forced marriage in the case of the women. TJ reparations programs includes compensation for harms endured (Margarrell 2007) but does not recognize or compensate for what women articulated in this dissertation as compensation for the time and life opportunities lost while in abduction.

Compensation and needs-based justice are like what reparation programs in TJ address, an indication that justice is inseparable from reparations. According to the international Center for Transitional justice (ICTJ), reparations are considered as having material and symbolic importance to victims and the most direct way of receiving justice.\(^{233}\) It was common for questions about what justice is and what reparation is for women, to generate similar responses further affirming ICTJ’s view that reparations have justice making elements. Reviewed literature in Chapter One noted that reparations publicly acknowledges wrong, restores dignity of survivors, provides compensation, restitution and rehabilitation, and guarantees non-repetition

(Duggan et al. 2008; Rubio-Marin and de Greiff 2007). Needs-based and compensation-based justice are closely linked to these reparation goals in transitional justice as they both provide acknowledgement and restore or enable lives of dignity for survivors. For example, a report by ICTJ noted that public acknowledgement of harm is the most crucial form of reparations to victims yet it often remains missing (Margarrell 2007). All in all, the study concludes that elements of lived justice such as compensation, relationship-based justice (including acknowledgement) and needs-based justice are intertwined with reparations.

Finally, senses of justice articulated by the women and analysed in this chapter can be seen as forms of transformative reparations. These notions enrich the already existing literature on reparations as a transformative concept. ‘Transformative reparations insists that reparations must aim at reconstruction of economic, social and political relations that oppress and expose women to violations’ (Walker 2016, 109). For example, compensating women and enhancing their abilities to meet basic needs economically transforms and reconstructs their lives, restores their dignity, eventually improving women’s social and political relationships with people around them. Similarly, in his study with male survivors of SGBV in northern Uganda, Philip Schulz (2020, 21) found that ‘reparations-especially material compensation and physical rehabilitation are expected to re-enable male survivors to provide for their families and thus live up to their gendered expectations and responsibilities and therefore constitute primary justice needs for Northern Ugandan male survivors.’ It is these scholarly conversations that my study contributes to. In the next chapter, I discuss women’s calls for recognition, acknowledgment, apology, and love as relationship-based justice that can all be summed up as reparations and ultimately, senses of justice, lived in the everyday.
Chapter 7: ‘As If You Were Already Dead’: Relationship-Based Justice

7.1 Introduction

Right now, it looks as if the government has deserted these mothers, yet they were abducted as very young girls and forced to be there [in captivity]. The pain of desertion sticks in your heart because you returned with a child you were not prepared for. Your family was not prepared to take care of that child either. How will they handle you? Even yourself, no one was ready for you because it was as if you were already dead. You came when no one was ready for you. The government should look at us with open eyes because we are pushed into in a very tight corner, and it keeps reminding us of the horror we went through. We are in a bad situation.234

Women who participated in the study indicated that justice is felt and lived in “good relationship” to and with others like family, friends, community, and government representatives and institutions. To introduce this chapter, I share the story of Lamaro (quoted above) whom I have known for eleven years. Writing about her reminds me of her pain of enduring rebel abduction and the courage to rise above this experience as much as it still hurts. She was abducted at the age of thirteen years in 1996 from a secondary school in northern Uganda, forced to be a wife to a senior LRA commander with whom she bore two children. Like many abducted children in northern Uganda, Lamaro’s family thought she had died because they had no further information about her whereabouts. Her family had already conducted her funeral after hearing rumors from returning abducted persons that she had been killed. However, Lamaro escaped rebel captivity in 2004, and returned home to Gulu eight years after her abduction.

Lamaro said that she would have escaped much earlier but the level of lies, miscommunication and manipulation235 they underwent made many abducted children like her believe what the LRA told them. For example, Lamaro was often told by the LRA leaders that all her relatives

234 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 31st, 2019.
235 Abducted children were often given false communication by commanders to make them forget about home. They were told that all Acholi people had been killed by the government and children who escape the LRA and speak on a radio show called dwog cen paco by a local FM were false as those were recorded voices of the murdered.
were already killed by the Ugandan government army. But one day she sneaked to listen to the radio, which was forbidden in the LRA. It was then that she learned her mother was still alive, as the radio announcer invited her to a meeting. When she heard the announcement, she thought, ‘oh, so my mother is alive?’ She decided at that very moment to escape and return home.

The father of Lamaro’s children also returned home and was granted blanket amnesty by the Ugandan government, giving him immunity from legal prosecutions. He made several attempts to reunite with Lamaro, but she completely rejected him on the grounds that she was abducted and forced to be with a man who was nearly three times her age. After returning home, Lamaro resumed education from secondary school level until she attained a bachelor’s degree from a reputable university in Uganda. It is this extraordinary and heroic courage Lamaro showed to rise above her experience in rebel captivity and sent all of us a message that she refused to be brought down by her abduction experience. Lamaro’s trajectory and agency are unique compared to other abducted women who for example, did not make it back to school. She currently has a professional employment in Uganda. Lamaro has remarried but still faces challenges with stigma and the pain of constantly hearing blame for a war she was a victim of. As an advocate for fellow abducted women, she often speaks for women who were abducted and need education, land and for their children to be supported by the government. Lamaro feels that it is important for children who were abducted to be recognized as victims of the war. In her words:

Bad war was fought. Bad things were done. But there were those ones who were just abducted. If your child was abducted at seven years old, grows up in the bush till they are twenty years old, can you imagine the level of brainwashing they have undergone? They tell you that ‘The government has killed all your relatives. Don’t go back home.’ So that brainwashing that is there, no one knows, and no one can believe it. Unless you were really there, you cannot know. You could hear people say, ‘oh, they stole food from someone’s garden.’ You were hungry, why just pass through a cassava garden when you are starving?²³⁶

For Lamaro, the pain she endured in the LRA is amplified by the pain of being blamed for the war and the lack of acknowledgement of her suffering. She feels abandoned by a state that never

²³⁶ Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 23rd, 2019.
protected her, and a community that did not understand the hardships she continued to endure every day such as hunger, or the fear of returning home when you were told the state had killed your family. To Lamaro and others, relationships of love, care and trust are broken.

In this chapter, I argue that women’s senses of justice are relationship-based. The participants expressed a desire to be connected and peacefully co-exist with their families, communities, and the Ugandan state,\(^{237}\) hence the emergence of the term relationship-based justice. The Ugandan state does not recognize women as victims of the LRA war, has not apologized but instead offered amnesty that seeks to “forgive” women for rebelling against the state. As discussed in Chapter One, some women rejected amnesties on the grounds that they never committed any war crimes and should be the ones “forgiving” the government for their failure to protect them and their communities. Yet it is the women who are blamed for LRA atrocities, and they are not recognized as victims and as such, stripped of their humanity. Women also articulated a sense of justice derived from peaceful co-existence with the state, their families and communities who still stigmatize and reject them in connection to the war. Women desire to feel love and belong; acknowledgment of their victimhood by the state and everyone in their vicinities would be a first step towards meeting this desire. Feeling loved and accepted create another feeling of satisfaction.

For justice to be there, participants emphasized that, the state must extend recognition and assume responsibility. Like other women who participated in the study, Lamaro wants recognition of her victimhood and of fellow abducted children (now mothers). From the quote above, she asserts that ‘she was just abducted’ and made to believe her relatives had been killed by the government. With this observation, she underscores that she was a victim of this abduction and should not be held responsible for any events that followed it; rather it is the state who bears responsibility. Another form of recognition Lamaro speaks of in the opening quote of this chapter, is that of suffering. In her words, ‘the pain of desertion sticks in your heart.’ That the state’s, families’, and communities’ refusal to recognize her victimhood amplifies her

\(^{237}\) Women’s demand for state recognition and apology begins a trust building relationship that can eventually lead to peaceful co-existence. When this happens, that involves senses of justice related to relationships.
suffering in the present. This suffering is further exacerbated by the fact that many are unable to meet their basic needs, as discussed in the previous chapter.

This chapter will discuss relationship-based senses of justice women raised throughout this study. Relationship-based justice draws attention to their desire to be recognized as persons, not perpetrators. In the first section of this chapter, I outline how women expressed the desire for the state to recognize their citizenship, humanity, and victimhood. In the second section, I demonstrate how state acknowledgement of its failure to protect children from being abducted, is critical to realize the preceding desire to be recognized as victims. Acknowledgement of the state’s failure to protect, the women stated, could take the form of a state apology and expression of forgiveness within communities who continue to stigmatize and blame women for the war. In the third section, I turn to the feelings expressed by women that would improve relationships: love, acceptance, and a sense of belonging within women’s families, communities, and the government. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of these senses of justice as articulated by women such as Lamaro.

7.2 Recognition of Humanity, Victimhood and Citizenship

Recognition is a concept of relationship-based justice. In this section, I present results on how women demand to be recognized as human beings, victims of the war and Ugandan citizens. Women’s calls for recognition of suffering builds on the discussion on compensation for lost years in abduction and suffering from the previous chapter. For example, government’s compensation would arguably be a recognition of women and their children born in captivity as true citizens of Uganda.

\[238\] While the state is expected to offer this recognition, women still expressed the need for their communities and family to also recognize their victimhood and humanity, and to cease blaming them for the war and stigmatizing them. This will improve relationships between the women and their communities.
7.2.1 ‘As Though We Are Not Citizens of Uganda:’ Recognition of Citizenship

Many children born in captivity do not have birth certificates and some youths have had a challenge getting national identity cards that were being issued to every Ugandan citizen because their mothers could not provide information like places of birth to support the registration process. There were no formal birth registrations and issuing of certificates in rebel captivity.\(^{239}\) A women’s rights activist elaborated some of the reasons women called for recognition of citizenship for them and their children:

We have deeper issues now Ketty, even the issue of national ID registration; they [children] don’t have their identities in terms of location and geographical focus.....they want the father’s and the mother’s identities. So that means when you are born in captivity, right now you miss out on critical documents from the government of Uganda. This is something you really need to take note of.\(^{240}\)

Even if all the mothers are citizens of Uganda given that they were born in Uganda, and their ancestral roots are in the Acholi sub-region of northern Uganda, mothers feel the government needs to take actions to reassure them of their citizenship by delivering forms of justice that enables their lives post abduction to thrive. Participants asked the government to repair them. One of these kinds of reparations is a recognition and affirmation of citizenship for themselves and their children born in rebel captivity. Participants’ repeated calls for compensation and other kinds of reparations from the government without yielding any results make them feel that they are treated differently as though they were less worthy of being Ugandan citizens. Participants believe that they will feel considered as citizens of Uganda if the government acknowledges the failure to protect and apologize for this failure, as I will elaborate in the next sections. There is also concern that this lack of recognition and offer of reparations could cause instability in the

\(^{239}\) During the national identity card registration and issuance process, every Ugandan was expected to provide clear information about their parents (father and mother), and their places of birth including district, county, sub county and village. For children whose parents remained in captivity or died before revealing this information to their mothers, accessing this registration was a challenge.

\(^{240}\) Key informant interview, Gulu town, October 7\(^{th}\), 2019.
future. Three participants mentioned the risk of instability, especially if their children are not recognized and supported socially, economically, and psychologically. I quote one of them:

We always prayed from time to time about the issue of reparation and some of us will die when the government has [not] done reparation to the victims. Our request to the president is that if he could help us with the children that we came with from captivity because the future of the children is longer than ours so that they do not start rebelling in the future, bringing war in Uganda. If they make them study and do what is expected of them as the citizens of Uganda, then it would make them live well and feel that as children born in captivity, they were welcomed in a proper way as the citizens of Uganda and would make them be responsible citizens. If they are not helped, it would lead to problems in the future. For us the mothers, we do not have a longer future and our focus is on the future of our children.\(^{241}\)

From the above quote, one can tell mothers’ frustrations with the absence of reparations that would have made them feel welcomed and that their children are accepted as Ugandan citizens. I discussed in Chapter Five how mothers called for a place-based sense of justice through access to land because their children born in captivity do not have a sense of identity and belonging. It is on this basis that participants asked for a relationship-based kind of justice through a formal recognition of them and their children as Ugandan citizens. As mothers put it:

The [Ugandan] government is not putting us as anything important whether you are educated or not. Sometimes programs come, but no one cares to say, ‘let us support these people as they were abducted when they were very young.’ No one cares as though we are not citizens of Uganda.\(^{242}\)

The government should consider us as important citizens that should have where to live. Because we came from the bush, and we came with children. Some of our children do not have their fathers and they do not even know their homes [or clans of origin].\(^{243}\)

To many participants, the government’s lack of support towards their quest for justice and reparations make them feel as if they are lesser citizens compared to the rest of Ugandans, let alone their children being denied access to national identity documents. Over my years of work

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\(^{241}\) Wang oo, Gulu town, October 11\(^{th}\), 2019.

\(^{242}\) Focus group discussion, Gulu town, October 31\(^{st}\), 2019.

\(^{243}\) Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 23\(^{rd}\), 2019.
in the region, I often heard them complain about being ignored by the government. This underpins their demand for justice in recognition and reaffirmation of citizenship for them and their children.

7.2.2 ‘We Are Also Human:’ Recognition of Humanity

Calls for reparations, particularly compensation, is linked to a recognition of humanity. When asked what their senses of justice were, participants reported that their suffering should be recognized by the government. Women noted that government should acknowledge their suffering and apologize. Participants reported that when these things are done, they will feel that they have been treated like any other human being and live normal lives like everyone else in their communities. This will in turn contribute to them being accepted by the community. The government’s lack of recognition of humanity, citizenship and victimhood deepens the exclusion and stigma women already experience. The state’s attention to this sense of justice articulated by women will influence the way women are perceived by their communities. The quotes below illustrate the need for recognition of women’s humanity.

They should pay us so that the bad thoughts and the suffering we went through could be erased from our minds and we start living equally like the people in our communities.\(^\text{244}\)

We are also human, and we are mistreated and segregated against. It makes us want to take our lives [commit suicide] and rather not stay [alive] suffering.\(^\text{245}\)

As discussed in Chapter Four, many mothers were rejected by their relatives and communities because of their connections to the LRA. This treatment – characterized by desertion and rejection – left participants feeling worthless and less human compared to others. From the second quote above, feelings of rejection, hopelessness and helplessness caused this mother to have suicidal thoughts. She is clearly demanding for and re-claiming her own humanity to be recognized and not be defined by what happened during the war. This demand for recognition of

\(^{244}\) Focus group discussion, Awach Sub County, September 13\(^{th}\), 2019.

\(^{245}\) Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 23\(^{rd}\), 2019.
humanity compliments women’s demands for dignified lives achievable by needs-based justice. Segregation, rejection, and stigma made participants call for a relationship-based justice that can be achieved through attitude change and actions from individuals, families, communities, and government representatives in areas where these women live. Actions from government could include creating a law that protects women and their children from stigma. This finding is similar to what a study with children born in captivity found, noting that children called for a bi-law to be created against stigma and violence (Denov and Lakor 2019). Participants underscored their need to feel that they are being treated equally and fairly like any other human being by not only the government, but also their families and communities for lived justice to materialize. In the absence of a recognition of humanity through compensation, provision of equal treatment to all citizens of Uganda, and ending stigma, participants’ lives remain injured. In Chapter Six, I discussed needs-based justice that women called for through enhancement of their abilities to meet their education, housing, and medical needs. Their calls for these needs-based senses of justice and reparations are linked to recognition of humanity. A recent study that collaborated with women like participants in this research, noted the importance of recognition of humanity by northern Ugandan women (Acan et al. 2019). Women want to be able to meet their daily living needs just like any other normal human being desires to do so.

7.2.3 ‘They Did Those Things:’ Recognition of Victimhood

Women demand everyone, including the government, to recognize their victimhood because they were abducted as children and forcefully taken to be part of the LRA. As quoted at the start of this chapter, Lamaro’s primary sense of justice is to be recognized as a victim of war because she was abducted as a schoolgirl, taken to the bush, and given as a wife to a rebel commander against her own will. Lamaro also spoke to the impact of indoctrination by the LRA commanders on their lives to the point that one ends up believing it. Participants are calling upon everyone to recognize them as victims because if they weren’t abducted, they would not have ended up with the LRA. Further, much of the stigma mothers face is also connected to their being blamed for the war yet they feel that there should be a relationship that is more recognizing of their
victimhood instead of viewing them as perpetrators. A participant called Lange, who went to the Ugandan Parliament to present a petition for reparations in 2014 had this to say:

There is some bad heart that people have towards those who returned from the bush. That is why even if you go to the Parliament, you could hear some of the Parliamentarians themselves saying from a distance that ‘they did those things.’\textsuperscript{246} Even if they say they will help, the corridor talks tell the opposite.\textsuperscript{247}

Lange was disappointed when she overheard some Parliamentarians speaking in English in the corridors of Parliament after a session they attended. The MPs assumed that these rural women did not understand English, but they heard it and feel the government does not have the will to genuinely support them as their victimhood is questioned. Lange also reported that she watched past LRA atrocities being broadcasted over television news that night in 2014 after their trip to Parliament. The news showed photos of people with mutilated lips, ears and noses, and some human body parts being cooked in a pot in Omot, Pader district of northern Uganda. She concluded that the news was a mockery to their calls for reparations insinuating that ‘look, they did all these, and they want reparations’ kind of tone. This example illustrates how women and formerly abducted persons are represented as part of a perpetrator group that caused the suffering of others. This representation and perception by certain media companies, politicians and Ugandans who did not directly experience the war omits women’s victimhood and survival. Therefore, women’s sense of justice is rooted in their demand for recognition of victimhood because such recognition will provide an environment for better relationships to thrive between them and politicians, media, fellow Ugandans, and the government. Agreeing with Lange, I quote below a participant who felt abandoned the moment she arrived home from captivity:

The moment they gave us amnesty, the government just left us and forgot about us. They are not doing anything for us. If for the issue of stigma, they have talked a lot in the radios, the local community members had conferences, many organizations talked about

\textsuperscript{246} The ‘things’ referenced here are forms of violence the LRA committed such as abductions, killings, rape, property destruction and torture among others as discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{247} Focus group discussions, Gulu town, October 31\textsuperscript{st}, 2019
it, but you find that stigma is not stopping. The government should get for us where to settle.  

The association of the women as part of the perpetrator group started the moment they were abducted. As discussed in the second chapter, once children were abducted, they were trained and forced to fight against their own communities. Amnesties which were issued to them to pardon their wrong contributes to this perception. It is this failure to recognize women’s victimhood that led them to demand for acknowledgement of government’s failure to guard against their abduction that I elaborate next.

### 7.3 Acknowledgement of Failure to Protect

Participants called upon the Ugandan government to acknowledge its failure to protect them from being abducted. As seen in Chapter Two, and Three, most participants were abducted when they were between seven and fifteen years old. They were all children when the rebels abducted them, the reason they note that if there had been adequate protection from the government, these would have been prevented. Others have reported that the government failed to offer sufficient protection to civilians in northern Uganda during the war (Pham, Vinck, and Stover 2008). Participants expressed that the government had a responsibility to protect its citizens in times of adversity such as war, but it didn’t.

In 2005, a United Nations World Summit resolution included the principle of responsibility to protect (RtoP). Article 138 notes, ‘each individual State has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. This responsibility entails the prevention of such crimes, including their incitement, through appropriate and necessary means (United Nations General Assembly 2005, 30).’  

As a member state of the United Nations, Uganda is party to observance of this principle. Yet instead of the government acknowledging its failure in this obligation and offering reparations, it has remained

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248 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 23rd, 2019
silent. Participants demanded that the government should acknowledge that it failed in its responsibility. This builds on discussions in Chapter Six as women’s demands for compensation-based justice from the government is connected to this failure to protect. As Laber narrated:

When I was being abducted, it is this current government [leadership] that was in power and when I returned, I luckily found it is still in power. But the government doesn’t do anything. There are those who were abducted, returned, and the government has never bothered to find out their identities, how many they are, and their whereabouts. Even if it is just merely talking about it and recognizing it, let it be done. But it [the government] oyiko wiye I kweyo (has buried its head [in the sand]) and does not care about anyone’s condition. So, that means there is no justice for us who returned from captivity. It is there for a certain group of people.....I remember I saw the government took concern on people who died in a bomb blast during a football match [at Kyadondo Rugby Club in Kampala]. I don’t remember the year [July 2010]. But the government has never bothered to cater for us. I believe that justice is for those who were not abducted. I don’t know. And, among others, what is making me to see that true justice doesn’t exist for us is because government didn’t come to the grassroots to talk to us, to look for us.²⁵⁰

Laber sees that justice is attainable when a government first acknowledges that something went wrong, reaches out to the survivors of harm for dialogue and works on repairing relationships that were broken by the experience of such harm. Like Laber, the majority of participants spoke about the lack of communication between them and government regarding their experiences and redress needed. It is a process that women described as crucial elements of relationship-based justice. Laber is making reference to a bomb attack that happened in 2010 at Uganda’s capital in Kampala at Kyadondo Rugby Club (Mudondo 2020) where the government recorded the names of each victim and offered monetary compensation of five million Ugandan Shillings ($1786 CND) to the families of the deceased and three million Uganda Shillings ($1071 CND) for survivors (Odongtho 2010). Participants are disappointed that the government has not done the same thing for them who were abducted during a war. They further reasoned that the bomb victims met their fates when having pleasure by watching a football match yet for them who were abducted from their homes or schools and spent years in suffering have not received the same level of attention from the government. To participants like Laber, acknowledgement

²⁵⁰ Oral history interviews, Gulu town, September 11th, 2019
would make them feel better, but the government *oyiko wiye I kweyo* ‘(has buried its head in the sand).’ This is an Acholi saying that means a person is ignoring things or those around them by keeping their heads hidden intentionally. Lack of government’s acknowledgement of its failure amounts to injustice to the women. Women remain stressed about the fact that if they had been offered adequate protection, their abduction would have been prevented. Yet despite this initial failure to protect, the government has continued to fail the women by ignoring them. These harmful acts slow women’s recovery from suffering associated to abduction. I quote more participants who spoke about the government’s protection obligations:

The government also did wrong by not protecting its citizens from being abducted by the rebels because if there was protection, we would not have been abducted. There was totally no protection from the government. Where I was abducted from, in Pokot, the rebels had freedom to do whatever they wanted. Most of the girls in our area were abducted and the ones who survived were those who had relatives in town and were taken there.\(^\text{251}\)

They never protected us. Like me, the soldiers hid the day I was abducted. They waited when the rebels had already taken me, then they started firing bullets after us. If they had protected us very well, we would not have been abducted. Even though they never protected us, now that we have returned home, the government is not doing anything for us. All our time was wasted in captivity.\(^\text{252}\)

These women’s stories are not surprising because I used to hear in my childhood that many government responses to LRA attacks came after the rebels had caused the havoc and left. Likewise, my colleagues and I at the Justice and Reconciliation Project encountered similar stories when documenting the Barlonyo Massacre. Massacre survivors reported that the army left Barlonyo shortly before the attack (Justice and Reconciliation Project and Liu Institute for Global Issues 2009). Human Rights Watch (2005) reported similar accounts of civilians being ignored, isolated and left unprotected by the Ugandan government. Women like Anyadwe feel frustrated by the fact that they were not protected in the first place, and now that they have returned home, nothing has been done to repair their lives. Therefore, an acknowledgement of

\(^{251}\) Focus group discussion, Awach Sub County, September 13\(^{th}\), 2019.

\(^{252}\) Focus group discussion, Gulu town, October 31\(^{st}\), 2019.
the failure to protect is in order, to enable good relationships between the government and its citizens.

Additionally, the government has a responsibility to recognize failure in fulfilling its state basic duties of protection according to International Law. International Law ‘defines the legal responsibilities of States in their conduct with each other and their treatment of individuals within State boundaries.’ This includes respect, protection, and promotion of human rights by States governed by various conventions. Uganda is a party to international legal conventions such as the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEWDAW) and Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) among others. As a child, I often wondered where the government army was when my family and I spent nights in the bushes to escape rebel abduction. Even when my school dormitory at Sacred Heart School was guarded by a few soldiers who successfully repelled the rebels, preventing our abduction in 1996, many people in northern Uganda who lived in the IDP camps and participants of this study have narratives of minimal or no protection at all. I also discussed in Chapter Two that there were both violent and non-violent responses to the war, including military operations and peace negotiations but as results show, these efforts didn’t fully offer the necessary preventative measures to participants who were little girls at the time of their abduction.

While most participants did not mention legal justice as an option for redressing their harm, it is upon the basis of this failure to protect that a few women, like Lamaro, called for the government to be prosecuted. In Lamaro’s words, ‘the government should be sued because they failed to protect the children of northern Uganda from being abducted. They failed.’ Where government fell short of its protection obligations, it needs to be held accountable as well. This indicates that some women see legal justice as one of the many justice options on the table despite the majority

not referring to it and feeling frustrated at the slowness of the system. Legal Anthropologists Faulk and Brunnegger (2016) noted that lack of timely and effective kinds of justice has engendered the emergence or revival of other informal ways of seeking justice. When victims of human rights violations including sexual violence experience the slowness of legal prosecutions while they continue suffering the consequences of harm, they are bound to look elsewhere. Lived justice in the everyday is one such alternative participants looked at, but also, Acholi society have their own justice and conflict resolution practices including reconciliation ceremonies like *mato oput* discussed in Chapter One.

### 7.4 Apology and Forgiveness

Other concepts of relationship-based justice are apology and forgiveness. If an apology is offered by the person or institution responsible like the government in this case, it will be the women’s choice to accept and forgive, or not. Where both apology and forgiveness are made possible through a dialogue between the women, the government and communities, relationships may be improved—hence a relationship-based sense of justice. Women like Lakalatwe quoted below expressed that the government of Uganda should have apologized for what happened:

> The government did not come to us when we returned, to apologize to us for what we went through in captivity and [for] not protecting us well enough from being abducted. We are now struggling with life on our own and to me there is no justice.  

According to Lakalatwe, no apology equals to no justice. This sense of justice is interconnected to other senses of justice as well. For example, recognition of citizenship, recognition of victimhood, acknowledgement of failure to protect and apology are all geared towards relationship building between the women and Ugandan government. Although a recognition of victimhood also involves members of communities where women live, who have often associated these women and their children with “perpetrators.” If one feels recognized as a Ugandan citizen, they are more likely to feel a sense of belonging with their fellow citizens.

\[255\] Oral history interview, Gulu town, September 11\textsuperscript{th}, 2019.
Apology by the government has the potential to ignite a process that can lead to forgiveness and reconciliation to happen between women and the state. The study acknowledges that determining when such a process can meaningfully amount to reconciliation remains a challenge. Further, these relationship-based senses of justice are challenging to achieve because no monetary values can be attached to them. It is dependent on human attitudes and political will to ensure these forms of justice are offered to the women. Yet attitude is a relatively subjective and difficult thing to change. But also, acknowledgement of harm and failure to protect comes with additional costs to the government. The participant below spoke to the importance of apology:

The government was supposed to welcome us [upon return from captivity], apologize to us and give us something to ease the suffering that we went through so that we can forget all the suffering we were subjected to.\(^{256}\)

Key informant interviews called for apology as well, noting that compensation may not be achievable. For example: ‘It is very hard to compensate the victims because a lot of wrong things were done that money cannot pay for. An apology would ease the hearts of the victims and victims’ families but as things stand now, not even a single sorry has been said to the victims.’\(^{257}\) Lack of apology makes participants feel that they are second class citizens of Uganda. Their suffering is not recognized, demands for reparations fall on deaf ears, and quests for acknowledgement of victimhood and apology remain dreams for many participants.

Nonetheless, as participants called for apology from the government, there were a few women who expressed the desire to be forgiven for fighting as Langec elaborates below. I did not ask participants about what happened inside the rebel group but allowed them to determine the scope of stories they were comfortable narrating. Even if Langec makes references to battles when she says, ‘fighting was not our interest,’ women like Laber refused to be called a soldier because she had too much to do as a mother to the point that fighting was impossible. She noted that she was bearing and raising children, cooking, cleaning, farming and being a wife to the father of her

\(^{256}\) Oral history interview, Gulu town, September 11\(^{th}\), 2019.
\(^{257}\) Interview with WAN chairperson, Gulu town, October 3\(^{rd}\), 2019.
children. There was too much to do for women that going to battles was impossible according to Laber. Langec notes:

For us who returned, the government should have said that ‘whoever is going home should be forgiven and should be given things [like compensation] that will help them forget the past.’ There, we would agree that there is some justice but in the absence of that, there is no justice for us. ……we feel that government didn’t think about us. In every meeting where the mothers gathered, you will hear them say ‘we were not protected. And that is why we are still suffering.’ That is why we still cry to them [the government] that they never protected us. They [the government] also cry that we shot them. But fighting was not our interest. The government should have forgiven us, full and real forgiveness. That is why we don’t have any justice.258

From the above quote, Langec tells us that the government’s failure to protect continues to the present, when she says, ‘we were not protected and that is why we are still suffering.’ In a nutshell, if women were given adequate protection by the government, their abduction and all the suffering that carries on to date could have been prevented. Therefore, a recognition of ‘failure to protect’ by the government will indicate a commitment to not only redress women’s suffering but to assure them and their children of protection in the face of future conflicts. Women want government to know that should any such conflicts erupt in the future, they should offer adequate protection and prevent violence from impacting civilians. Without this, government may be perceived as failing to uphold its duties. Demanding apology from the government pushes it to recognize its part in perpetuating the harm and transfers the women’s burden of being blamed for the war to the State.

In contrast to Laber who refused to be called a soldier as she was tending to motherhood and other responsibilities, Langec never had children. The likelihood that she fought is not disputable although she didn’t succinctly speak about battles. Therefore, not all women who were in the LRA cannot be seen as one uniform group: they each had different experiences as I shared in the earlier chapters. For Langec, a demand for apology from the government goes hand in hand with a request for forgiveness for any wrongs she may have committed. Some women may have

258 Oral history interview, Gulu town, September 26th, 2019.
fought and committed atrocities alongside men in the LRA. While Langec does not speak about fighting, she somehow, acknowledges her responsibility in causing harm, the reason she asks for forgiveness. Further, since government and communities blame women like Langec for violence irrespective of their roles in the conflict, Langec feels a call for forgiveness would mend these broken relationships whether they committed violence or not. This urge for “full and real forgiveness” backs the women’s questioning of amnesties they received from the government. Being offered amnesty that they dispute as inappropriate given they were victims who should have been protected in the first place, the pardon connected to amnesty is not considered “true and real.” This is because the government has not acknowledged women’s victimhood, citizenship, apologized or given reparations. But also, Langec emphasized that if the government had protected them, they would not have ended up with the LRA, thereby pushing all the responsibility for apology and correcting this wrong to the government.

If the government, Acholi community, media and politicians associate the women with perpetration of violence because of being abducted and forced to be part of the rebel group, then let them offer “real and true forgiveness.” The woman below says wa loko ki cwer cwiny (we talk with hurting hearts) to depict the pain of having to “beg” for forgiveness. That is why it hurts. Women found themselves in a situation where they have nowhere to belong, to a point that even if it means they should accept responsibility for wrong they should have been protected from:

For me to live a better life in the future, this is like a cry. I send my request to the government if it can turn its eye/gaze on us who returned from the bush with children to feed. Let it give us a glance. It should not just leave us like that. Any NGOs truthfully, if they care, let them turn and look at us and put us as something of priority, something important. The year [2019] is almost ending, all the various leaders, like the MPs, the women leaders should be the first to remember us the girls who returned from the bush, but that is not happening. Where should we go my people? (wan dong wadok ka kwene...ajone). We talk with hurting hearts, but we just request you, we beg for forgiveness. There is nothing else we can do. If you just leave us like that, we shall stay like that. So, forgive us. 259

259 Women’s initial workshop, Gulu town, August 20th, 2019.
Additionally, some women forgave the fathers of their children and continued the relationship as discussed in Chapter Four. Women’s act of forgiving the fathers of their children and continuing the forced marriages reinforce their view that government had responsibility to protect these men too. Women view the fathers of their children as victims of abduction who should have been protected by the government. Still, women expect an apology from these commanders because even if some of them were abducted and forced to do what they did, they owe women apologies and recognition of harms they caused. For example, Lagum’s husband, despite being brutal and beating her in captivity, has never apologized for his actions. But women’s act of forgiving the men and continuing these relationships is, arguably, in fulfilment of relationship-based senses of justice. I quote a women’s rights activist who understands the women’s senses of justice when it comes to relationality:

If forgiving these men is going to put food on their table, it’s going to reconcile them because they have seen it all… then they are ready to do it and the women are not looking at this man the way we are seeing [them] as abusers, perpetrators of violence, [or men who] molested them. They will tell you that, he is the father of my children, I have a relationship beyond sex and abuse. So, the women are forgiving their husbands for increasing their wellbeing, for their hearts to be completely healed, to reconcile, and to ensure that they will access what they lack. Remember even [when] they make these choices, they don’t see any tangible support towards their livelihood or reparation, rehabilitation, return and recovery. There is no special focus that has come to that. So, the women feel that ‘what if I go back and live with the same man after all I already have children maybe it will make my life much better.’

7.5 Love, Acceptance and Belonging

An aspect of relationship-based justice that came out of this study was love. In this context, women use the idea of love (maa) to mean a sense of care, peaceful co-existence and acceptance from people and institutions around them. For example, an acknowledgement of humanity, failure to protect and offering compensation can be read by the women as practices of care and expressions of love from the government. Women expressed the desire to be loved and accepted by the government, local leaders, their families, and community members. In previous chapters, I

\[260\] Key informant interview, October 7th, 2019.
discussed how the majority of women who returned from captivity with children were rejected by their own families and communities. This rejection, among other factors discussed in Chapter Four, left many women with no choice, but to continue the relationships with the fathers of their children after returning home even when they did not want to be with these men. Participants feel a lack of love in their surroundings yet love and acceptance by those around them and their children could make them feel a sense of camaraderie and belonging. For example, a study with male counterparts of these women found that justice meant being in a group because the group addresses isolation problems, rebuilds relationships and offers safe spaces for storytelling among others (Schulz 2019). The storytelling groups such as Rwot Lakica that I referenced at the start of this dissertation served these purposes. However, important relationships of love are not only among women and fellow women, but with others outside of their groups, hence the call for this loving and accepting relationships from those around them. With no love, acceptance and feelings of belonging, women will continue to feel a big relationship justice gap. I quote:

My point covers the government and all the civilians. The issue of maa (love). If there is no love, we do not find life easy. First, our government is not showing us love. If the government loved us, in reality, our leader would come and talk to all of us. But they have not called us, the returnees to say, ‘thank you for coming home. You can live like this, like that.’ They never did that. They draft the national budget, but they never include us in it. There is no love even back in the community [that we live in]. That is breaking our hearts so much.261

As one woman noted, ‘people still don’t love us because they think the worst of us.’262 I argue that this kind of love exhibited in caring relations, acceptance and peaceful co-existence is an important ingredient to meaningful and lasting justice. From the above and previous quotes, the women felt that since there was no formal welcome to them from the government leaders, no apology, and no reparations, love is missing. Maa is the Acholi word for love. Maa pe I kom wa (we are not loved) is a common phrase used by the women when discussing their relationships with people and institutional representatives in their vicinities. Maa in Acholi involves total acceptance of a person with all their flaws but also used in the context of things one likes.

261 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 23rd, 2019.
262 Focus group discussion, Gulu town, August 23rd, 2019.
including a specific kind of food, dressing, dance, or color. To be welcomed officially by the
government accompanied with reparations, amounts to acceptance, and acts of _maa_. If the
government had expressed these acts of love, women’s relatives and communities would have
been more likely to emulate the same by accepting women and their children. Every year the
Ugandan government has a national budget and Lagen referred to lack of love from the
government as a factor in their exclusion from the national budgeting.\textsuperscript{263} According to one of the
participants above, the absence of love is because of the absence of recognition of victimhood.
Relatively, another participant raised the issue of trust by the government and people around
them as a key ingredient to relationship-based justice. If a relationship of trust, meaningful
forgiveness, acknowledgement and love between the women and the government, their relatives
and communities exist, relationship-based justice will be achieved. For example:

They [the government] should open their eyes on us and make us live among the people
so that we also see that they are trusting us. If they leave us like we are now, we could
think that we are not in the government’s plan.\textsuperscript{264}

Women felt that it is the absence of love from the government, communities, and families that
breed mistrust and denial of women’s existence as victims who need support to recover from
wartime gender-based violence. Love, trust, and inclusion in government planning such as
national budgets are things that will make women feel that they have been welcomed back home
from rebel captivity and have been truly accepted. To be accepted by people in the women’s
surroundings is to feel and access lived justice that thrives on these accepting and loving
relationships with institutions of governance and people who run them in the everyday.

Further, for the women, loving and accepting relationships among human beings involve a sense
of care and ensuring that those you love have what they need to live their lives appropriately.
Women continue to long for this nature of relationship with their government in the sense that
government can offer tangible support to ensure they can afford their housing, medical, feeding

\textsuperscript{263} Every year, Ugandan government prepares a national budget, but women wonder why their needs and
carens do not make it to this budget.
\textsuperscript{264} Focus group discussion, Awach Sub County, Gulu district, September 13\textsuperscript{th}, 2019.
and children’s education (needs-based justice). It is this accepting relationship that could let the relatives, families and communities of these women apportion to them land and places to live with their children. What if the women had places to live and were able to meet their needs? Relationships can improve among women and their families or communities if they have their own assets like land. That said, the government has a huge influence on enhancing this kind of relationship-based justice by giving land or housing or some forms of compensation to the women so that their relatives can accept and love them again after so much suffering. Women’s rejection in some scenarios have been due to the economic burden they give their relatives. Achievement of needs-based justice enhances the achievement of relationship-based justice when women cease to be seen as burdens by their relatives and communities. I quote a key informant:

To me, what is most important is for these women to have land and a house should be built for them on that land. Once their relatives see that they have their own property, they will return to accept them.265

In hopes of being accepted, participants demanded that stigma towards them and their children should cease. Social stigma is one of the biggest challenges the women and their children face in northern Uganda. They are called all kinds of names like olum olum (bush people), and dwog cen paco (those who returned home). Non-profits and other organizations have implemented projects for ending social stigma, some of which I worked for before coming to do my PhD. For example, as part of the gender justice program at the Justice and Reconciliation Project, I facilitated women’s outreach activities to speak to communities about what it meant to be abducted and how they should be accepted. These activities only impacted the few communities our organization reached, but stigma is still a big problem because it is engrained in people’s attitudes and perceptions of events and those around them. For as long as people in Acholi and Uganda do not recognize and see the humanity and victimhood of these women and their children, ending stigma remains challenging. Yet to the women, continuous stigma is an obvious communication to them that they are not accepted, not loved, not welcomed and not innocent. I

265 Key informant interview, Awach Sub County, Gulu district, Oct 29th, 2019.
remember that between 2010 and 2012, when one woman in Alero sub county from one of the Women’s Advocacy Network groups that I worked with told me that stigma may never end because it is as though their experiences are written on their backs permanently for everyone to always see. She wondered what it would take to erase stigma. Some participants in this study called to policy makers to develop a legal framework for ending social stigma. This is similar to a finding reported by Miriam Denov and Angela Atim Lakor (2019) that a protective by-law against stigma and violence towards children born in captivity in northern Uganda was necessary. Laber illustrates this:

The worst thing that makes me feel there is no justice is that I was taken from this very Uganda of ours, and I returned to the same Uganda. But it is the people of our Uganda who are pointing fingers at us, stigmatizing us yet they did not have any ability to stop our abduction from happening. They let me go muleme (very easily). When I returned, you are stigmatizing me, you are calling me all sorts of inappropriate names. Why doesn’t government that has authority come up with a law and implement it? Government is encouraging stigma to continue yet it is the father of the law that can create a law to stop that. That means there is no justice. If there was a way to stop stigmatizing people who returned from the bush and the bad names we are called, I will at least be elated as I will feel that justice has been done.  

It is interesting that a woman like Laber did not ask for legal justice to redress her actual experience of forced marriage but rather called for policy actions to address the consequence-her experience of stigma. This demonstrates that redress often focuses on the experience of harms and not consequences of such harm. Lamaro, Laber and Langec see a contribution legal justice can make in providing redress to them and fellow women. However, a women’s rights activist quoted below noted that the slowness of legal justice and its inability to dispense timely justice remain problematic. Still, women’s calls for a relationship-based justice through acknowledgement of failure to protect, victimhood, and apology, while they improve relationships between women and those around them, are also components of transitional justice. In the absence of an effective legal justice system, women desire an everyday form of justice livable in peaceful relationships with those around them including government representatives.

266 Oral history interview, Gulu town, September 11th, 2019.
The justice system is not really dispensing… the dispensation of justice is delaying peaceful coexistence; it’s delaying justice itself to the extent that you wait in vain. Just one man is taking us seven years. So, who should still sit there and wait? People have now started [saying] that they need justice for themselves, restoration for themselves and their families. That is why the conversation on transitional justice is aligned to compensation and reparation. Even the truth telling conversation is now fading out because people are fearing opening up new wounds. People are just looking at restoration you know…and because truth telling comes with accountability. The other aspect of accountability you will end up in court.267

The above quote is referring to the trial of Thomas Kwoyelo, a former LRA commander that I discussed in Chapter One. Participants asked for a lived form of justice that allows their lives to go on. If the trial of one man takes seven years and has not yet been concluded, what would life look like for them in those years that trials are going on. Perhaps more women would have called for legal justice if they lived in a world where the justice system is effectively working and delivering timely justice. But they have seen it in Uganda where all they have done is wait endlessly. Yet they are being confronted with no reparations, lack of recognition, social stigma, rejection, lack of basic needs and their voices are silenced.

The demand for their voices to be heard was expressed as a sense of justice. Women reported that they have been asking for support and actions to be taken for a long time and they are tired of waiting for their voices to be heard. Arguably, an element of relationship-based justice is the practice of listening and responding to the voices of the women by the leaders. I quote:

For justice to prevail, the leaders have to listen to the people and the people also have to listen to the leaders. When the leader comes to share things with them, they should be understandable and harmonize the issues.268

What should be done is to let the voices of the mothers and girls be heard all over the world so that women can be free. I conclude by saying that if the world listens to our voices, war is not something good and the people who suffer the most are mothers and children. So, we want our lives to be renewed and learning programmes given to us and counselling should be provided because we move in different places, and we get

267 Key informant interview, Gulu town, October 7th, 2019.
heartbroken always and it takes us back to the suffering we went through in captivity like sexual assault.269

In the words of another woman, ‘we have difficulties because we have no voice and rights and the clans of our husbands do not know us.’270 The above participants emphasized a sense of justice achievable in being heard. One problem this research set out to address was the silencing of women’s voices in determining what justice, redress and accountability is for them and their children post war in northern Uganda. Only a small section of the current Ugandan transitional justice policy focuses at SGBV. Lived experiences of women and girls remain marginal in justice and peace debates in Uganda. Further, women have been asking the government for compensation and other kinds of reparations for more than a decade including their petition of Uganda’s Parliament for reparations. These are the women’s voices that have been ignored. It is because of this ongoing marginalization of their voices and views about redress of their suffering that led them to identify voice as a sense of justice. In the next conclusive section, I engage further with women’s voices on what relationship justice means.

7.6 Discussion and Conclusion

Mothers stated that feeling loved and accepted by government and community leads to satisfaction. Satisfaction is a valued sense that comes with feelings of being recognized, and acknowledged as an individual survivor, but also as a social group of wartime sexual violence and forced marriage survivors. Satisfaction means having an inner state of closure, peace, and achievement of something one always wanted like justice. Satisfaction is one of the attributes that any other kind of justice can offer. Relationship-based justice leads to the achievement of lived justice with individual and social satisfaction at the core of that justice journey.

Additionally, human beings generally aspire to feel loved, recognized and accepted by those around them for their lives to go on smoothly. In the absence of these, even if a legal process

269 Wang oo, Gulu town, October 11th, 2019.
270 Wang oo, Gulu town, October 11th, 2019.
punishes a perpetrator, for as long as these aspirations are not satisfactorily met, participants will not feel any sense of justice. Justice is a feeling. It is a feeling that is experienced in connection with recognition, acknowledgement, affirmations of worthiness, and total acceptance of the women. These concepts of relationship-based justice satisfy the sense of justice as not only lived and relational, but also as felt at individual, communal and national levels. In this sense, justice is a feeling of satisfaction that can be achieved through ending social stigma, hatred and anger towards the women and their children, apologizing for failure to protect and recognition of victimhood among others as the chapter discussed. Women need justice that is felt and lived in the everyday. Feeling loved and accepted create another feeling of satisfaction. Satisfaction is reparative and drives the women’s calls for relationship-based justice back home to reparations.

I discussed in the previous chapter that justice is a form of reparation, based on participants’ calls for compensation and needs-based justice. This chapter builds on that argument because relationship-based justice are elements of reparations. Recognition, acknowledgement, and apology are all processes embedded within reparations and formal transitional justice processes such as truth seeking but taken individually, they do not fulfill women’s senses of justice as relationship based. Each of these concepts complement each other to bring about relationship-based justice. The study’s finding that recognition and acknowledgement must be accompanied with apology and reparations, lest they remain insignificant in delivering this sense of justice, contributes to justice literature. This chapter is situated in justice literatures that focus on SGBV. For example, a study with male survivors of sexual violence in northern Uganda reported that their perception of justice included recognition, official acknowledgment and reparations by the government that was responsible for prevention and perpetration of harm (Schulz 2020). To add, recognition allows us to look beyond the law as it is an individually-centered notion of justice, a key element of redress for harms suffered (Aola´Fionnuala 2012).

Women indicated that justice is reparations and vice versa. Recognition of citizenship has a deeper meaning. First, the government’s failure to stop the women’s abduction made them feel as if they were lesser citizens of Uganda. Secondly, the absence of apology and acknowledgement from the government or even issuing them compensation has left women
feeling that they are not valuable citizens. Thirdly, the rejection women face upon return from their parents, relatives, in-laws, and communities, including denial of their children’s national identity registration exacerbate these feelings. Therefore, women’s calls for the recognition of citizenship is an invitation to a deeper understanding and action from the government institutions, communities, and families where they live. Feelings of citizenship come with feelings that your voices are heard, your suffering is acknowledged and repaired, that you have senses of belonging and feeling loved in one’s community. If none of these feelings exist, justice remains an unachievable dream for women in northern Uganda. Instead, lack of these feelings kill feelings of satisfaction that should come with any justice process. The level of trust women should have in the ability of any justice process to fill these satisfaction gap diminishes overtime.

Further, this chapter is very significant because relationship-based justice relates to some of the root causes of the northern Ugandan war. Women’s calls for recognition of citizenship, recognition of victimhood, acknowledgement of failure to protect, apology, and the desire to be loved and accepted relate to some of the issues I discussed in Chapter Two as causes of the war. I argue that political causes of the war like the North-South divide that largely saw the North as a region for provision of security and other forms of labor for the Southern part of the country, the marginalization of the Acholi ethnic group given its connection with the previous president of Uganda the Late General Tito Okello Lutwa, and the counter-insurgency campaign that happened prior to the war among other things, made the Acholi people feel that they were second class citizens. Government’s act of ignoring women’s calls for justice can be viewed as an extension of its reluctance to prevent or end the war tainted by its stereotypes and marginalization of the Acholi based on ethnic ties with previous national political leadership. In the 1990s, northern Uganda felt excluded as though it was not part of Uganda. I was amazed when my Liberian friend Doris with whom I did my masters in the United States between 2012-2014 asked me: ‘why do you always introduce yourself as someone from northern Uganda, and not simply Uganda?’ I explained to Doris how the war made us feel separated from the rest of the country and it was natural that my brain reasoned that way when talking about my country.
More so, our generation grew up knowing that northern Uganda suffered exclusions even in terms of jobs, developmental projects, and other social services from the current national leadership. Most women who participated in this study are my agemates. They were abducted in the same atmosphere, that of discrimination and marginalization, and they returned to the same. As one of them clearly put it earlier, she was abducted when the current government was in leadership, she returned and found the same political leadership. This means that the women’s demand for recognition of citizenship as a form of justice relate to some of the root causes of the war especially the marginalization of northern Ugandans. They are asking for what any other Acholi, including me, would demand from the government. And to the women, it is not mere verbal statements that they expect from the government to show recognition of citizenship, it should be paired with meaningful reparations. It is not that the Acholi people and the women are not devoted enough, we just need to feel the government’s love, recognition, and support towards us so that it feels more real that we are Ugandan citizens.

Additionally, governments’ failure to offer adequate protection and a military pursuant of a counter insurgency campaign against civilian Acholi in the 1980s when it just took over power, illustrated its lack of recognition of Acholi peoples’ citizenry in Uganda. Since some of the men who fought against the current President’s takeover in Tito Okello’s government joined the LRA, anyone who was part of the LRA whether abducted or not had been lumped into one group—enemies of the state, therefore making the government reluctant to recognize their victimhood, offer apology and compensate war survivors including women who were abducted as children. Women are basically holding government accountable to its duties and responsibilities. If they failed to protect, regardless of the reasons why, it is time to recognize that failure and offer reparations. It is until women who experienced sexual violence in war see the government responding to their demands, that the relationship of love, trust, and acceptance will emerge. When these relationships emerge, women will feel satisfied and live justice in the everyday.

Lastly, relationship-based justice illustrates how significant social harmony is at all levels of Acholi society. Social harmony defined as, ‘a shared and highly valued ideal in Acholi society, denotes a state of ‘normal’ relations among the living and the dead, an idea of cosmological
equilibrium, and social balance of power and moral order (Porter 2013, 3).’ As discussed in Chapter Five, there are spiritual dimensions to women’s demand for land because in Acholi, land is a place of identity, belonging and continuation of relationships between the living and the dead. But also, relationships among the living extend to include institutions of governance or their representatives. By this, government becomes a social institution that needs to embody Acholi cosmological understanding regarding the concept of social harmony. In a war where the line between victims and perpetrators are not defined, it is understandable that women defined their senses of justice in a different term from what people would perceive as justice. The complexity of separating victims from perpetrators led participants to ask for acceptance, and an end to stigma. In some ways, they are acknowledging that they took part in the war by asking for forgiveness. But at the same time, they are rejecting this perception that they were fighters given that they were abducted and forced, and the government could have protected them.

Therefore, women’s victimhood is a fundamental element of relationship-based justice. They are refusing to be seen as perpetrators even if women were blamed by communities for cooking and supporting rebels. Indeed, if protection mechanisms were strong enough during the war, perhaps fewer children could have been abducted. I mentioned earlier that I often wondered why the government was not stopping the war when my family slept in the bushes in Gulu district to escape abduction. Moreover, both victims and perpetrators live together after war, and are related to each other. A “perpetrator” was a victim as he or she was abducted and is also a father or mother of a child born in captivity, is daughter or son of an Acholi parent whose family members were murdered by the rebels. There are so many webs of relationships for participants to navigate as they live their lives post abduction. Therefore, with social harmony as the core of relationship-based justice, a focus on relationship building within families, communities and government as participants articulated are practical to enable everyday lived justice.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

Having worked in northern Uganda for nearly twenty years as a practitioner and more recently as a scholar, I have observed a scholarly and pragmatic knowledge gap on women’s senses of justice in the aftermath of wartime forced marriage. In this concluding chapter, I reflect on what I have come to understand from the women in northern Uganda as a theory of lived justice and the contributions this makes to the literature on conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and transitional justice. I then outline some of the methodological contributions of the thesis to the study of SGBV in wartime, reflecting on my collaborative, participatory and long-term relationships with women in this study. Before turning to the limitations of the study and future research directions, I advance policy recommendations to different justice stakeholders in Uganda that were identified during a dissertation validation and dissemination workshop between May 31st and June 1st, 2021, held in Gulu town (and on zoom).

To remind the reader, this qualitative research focused on understanding women’s senses of justice and reparations after wartime sexual violence and forced marriage. Over a period of seven months in 2019, two phases of field work were conducted. I worked with fifty-nine women who were abducted by the LRA rebels when they were between seven and sixteen years old and kept as wives, porters, fighters, and mothers of rebel commanders’ children for anywhere from one to fifteen years. These women participated in oral history interviews, focus group discussions, storytelling circles and workshops. I did nine key informant interviews with women’s rights activists, religious, political, and traditional leaders, and community-based organization representatives. These participants addressed the following research questions: Why do mothers decide to reunite or not with the fathers to their children born of forced marriage and sexual violence? How do women make these decisions? What is the prevailing sense of justice and reparation sought by women who had children from forced marriage?
8.1 Contributions to Conflict Related SGBV and Transitional Justice Literature

An important contribution of this thesis is the concept women identified as “time lost” due to the failure of the government of Uganda to protect them from abduction in the first place, and the many harms they suffered as a result in captivity and after their return to Uganda. As I have argued, the majority of women do not necessarily hold former LRA commanders responsible for compensating for the harm and suffering due to their shared experience of abduction. Given that women’s suffering is cumulative and long-term, they argued that they want reparation for the ongoing and daily suffering at the hands of family, community, the LRA and the state, that do not recognise their victimhood, and results in living a life where they feel they do not belong, and are denied dignity, love, and citizenship.

In this dissertation, I approach theory as a way of mapping different elements of justice identified by participants as they intersect and relate to one another. Lived justice in a holistic sense demonstrates how the unique experiences of women abducted and forced into marriage is embedded within wider institutions of exclusion that are economic, patriarchal, and social. It is the cumulative impact of harm that women want legal and policy mechanisms to address. Poverty, inability to meet basic needs, loss of dignity, stigma, blame, and rejection are examples of the cumulative impact of harm. Lived justice theory demonstrates how women in this dissertation experience and expect the world around them to be and offers a story to make sense of justice grounded in the women’s worlds. This theory challenges limited approaches to SGBV in transitional justice that prioritize legal recourses or reparations for the harm of forced marriage and pregnancy, offering a holistic interpretation grounded in lived experience. Given “time lost”, it makes sense that women identified justice as a living concept with interconnected elements that I have gathered under the themes of (1) place-based justice, (2) needs-based justice, (3) compensation-based justice, and (4) relationship-based justice. I have argued in this dissertation that these four themes intersect to bring about senses of justice as relational, holistic, and lived in the everyday. I elaborate on these themes below.
8.1.1 Place-Based Justice

I argued in Chapter Five that justice is place-based in connection to women’s access to and ownership of land. Nearly every participant asked for land. The senses of justice connected to land were articulated in women’s views that land is home, land is livelihood, land is healing, and land as something that connects women to culture and provides a sense of identity for them and their children. Further, home is also defined as a place in which one’s ancestors flourish and relationships are strengthened. Yet this remains challenging not only because women are denied land access and decision making on use and utilization of economic resources within patriarchal systems, but because of land wrangles, poverty and the impact of the war that led to their rejection. These customary practices around marriage and land informed how home came to be defined in terms of women and children’s identities and senses of belonging. Acholi is a patrilineal society that primarily grants ownership of land to men in particular clans. A woman can access land through purchasing it, her paternal family, or the family she marries into. But most participants in this study are single and landless underscoring their need for place-based justice that can address their situation. Senses of justice as place-based advances feminist interventions in the field of sexual violence and transitional justice which narrowly conceptualize justice and reparation for survivors as social and economic (Aolain, O’Rourke, and Swaine 2015). It illustrates the importance women attach to identity and belonging rooted in one's right to land, something not considered to date in largely Western legal studies (Franke 2006). It also advances recent discussions of the challenges of seeking justice for children born of war. The participants in the study link their desire for place-based justice not only for themselves, but for the future of their children. Their senses of placed-based justice, then, is relational. Their search for identity and belonging cannot be separated from their children's search for identity and belonging (Parra 2018; Watson 2007; Baines and Oliveira 2020).

8.1.2 Compensation-Based Justice and Needs-Based Justice

Two further elements of lived justice are compensation-based and needs-based justice. Most women expressed the need for children’s education as a priority. To be able to live in a decent
house, educate their children, feed, and treat their family members when they are sick makes one feel at par with fellow humans. I argue that being able to meet these basic needs allows women to live lives of dignity and restores a sense of worthiness that had been destroyed by the experiences of wartime forced marriage and sexual violence. Women said that since they never studied because their youthful years were wasted in abduction, they want to achieve these education dreams in their children and guarantee bright futures for their children, who will in turn support them as they grow into senior citizens. This is what I termed needs-based justice.

Compensation is often understood in transitional justice literature as recognition of the harm such as wartime sexual violence in this case, and to alleviate economic, social and health based needs (Roman and Choi 2009). But participants’ notion of harms suggests a more holistic notion of compensation that considers recognition of personhood and morally related harms such as “time lost” in captivity (kare wa ma obale I amak), shattered future dreams (anyim wa ma obale), and suffering endured in the bush (can ma wadeno ilum). This plea for compensation was directed to the government on the grounds that it had a responsibility to protect as elaborated in Chapter Six, and closely intersecting with and reinforcing relationship-based senses of justice discussed in Chapter Seven. Compensation in this thesis implies a recognition of the multiple harms women endure because of their abduction. Harms women feel the government does not address, which in turn, devalues them as citizens in their own country. Arguably, verbal formal statements from government representatives may be perceived as empty by women if they do not involve monetary or tangible compensation.

8.1.3 Relationship-Based Justice

This dissertation also asserts that women’s senses of justice are relationship-based because there is an element of desiring to be connected to and live together with people in their surroundings. My interpretation of these desires for connectedness is founded in women’s perceived sense of

271 Compensation in this dissertation does not involve restitution because women argued that their lives and time wasted while abducted can never be restored. The reason one of the women stated, ‘I cannot become a girl again,’ or moo ka oton icip pe nange (it is impossible to recover all oil that has spilled).
justice as livable and achievable in peaceful and harmonious co-existence with their families, communities, leaders, governmental and non-governmental institutions. I discussed various senses of justice raised by women with aspects of relationality and connectedness, hence the emergence of the term relationship-based justice. For example, I discussed in Chapter Seven women’s persistent calls for acknowledgement of the failure to protect them by the government and harm they endured. Women also demanded recognition of their victimhood and citizenship, and an end to stigma arguing these elements were necessary for them to feel loved and accepted by communities and families they returned to. After many years in rebel abduction, women feel that they are treated like lesser citizens of Uganda because, besides the government’s failure to protect them from being abducted, they have done nothing to address women’s pain. The government has not formerly welcomed them, recognised their pain, or offered an official apology. These are the forms of justice that, according to participants, can be achieved in better interactions and quality of relationships with others in their everyday lives post violence. I understand such demands for recognition as agentive and acts of refusal to be defined by their past traumatic experiences that remain visible in their lives and a demand to be accepted without the labels of “bush wives,” “rebel wives” or “forced wives” that has been normalized in the literature on women and war that continually stigmatize women. Further, the senses of justice women articulated in peaceful co-existence and relationships with not only their relatives and communities, but also the state which they uniquely describe as a relationship important to them to have a sense of belonging expands the literature on social harmony (Clarke 2009; Porter 2013) and traditional justice mechanisms. This includes Acholi justice mechanism that focuses on inter-kin relationships (Hovil, Quin, and Refugee Law Project 2005; Liu Institute for Global Issues and Gulu District NGO Forum 2005) but moves beyond narratives of victimization based on SGBV to the desire to repair relationships with the state.

8.1.4 Decision Making on Ending or Continuing Forced Marriage

To date, research on SGBV has largely focused on what happens to women and girls inside rebel groups or during war. For example, studies have documented the kinds of harm women endure, and seek to name such harms in legal or political terms like forced marriage, forced pregnancy
and rape among others (Grey 2017; O’Brien 2016; Park 2006; Toy-Cronin 2010). Researchers also documented the roles women play to understand the gendered operation of armed groups and consequences of SGBV on survivors (Akello 2013; Annan et al. 2009; Carlson and Mazurana 2008; Kiconco 2015). There has been limited attention to what women and their children born because of forced marriages in war do with these relationships when the war ends.

In Chapter Four, I explored factors that influenced women’s decisions to reunite or not with the fathers of their children who are perceived to be perpetrators. These factors are interwoven with women’s sense of justice as lived. For example, of those that reunited with the fathers of their children born in captivity, most of them did so because they wanted land to stay with their children. Participants wanted their children to have a sense of identity as they had been rejected by their relatives and communities and felt ignored by the Ugandan government. Some women had forgiven and mercifully fallen in love with the former commanders. These factors are connected to relationship-based senses of justice women articulated, especially the desire to be recognized as victims, humans, and Ugandan citizens, and to be accepted and peacefully live, and co-exist with their families, communities, and the state. Participants who reunited wanted children’s paternal clans to pay school fees and meet their needs as well as those of their children, since they are responsible for causing their suffering. Women who rejected the fathers of their children upon escaping rebel abduction demand the right to choose their husbands freely for marriage and to be recognised in their marital homes.

The concept of “love on top of mercy” discussed in Chapter Four challenges scholarly literature on forced marriage that has neglected an analysis about the complexities and circumstances under which feelings of love can develop in coercive settings. A processual kind of love that involves acceptance and forgiveness of a commander and building a relationship that lasts years after the war ends. For example, besides one study that discussed possibilities of love developing in coercive settings (Dubal 2016), my study provides the first in-depth account of women’s decision-making on continuing or ending forced marriages. Even if research shows women do not reunite with commanders because of anger, resentment or a lack of consent and torture (Aijazi and Baines 2017; Jain 2008; Shanahan and Veale 2016; Kiconco 2015; Porter 2013), my
study expands these literature by providing detailed accounts of the process and circumstances that led some of the women to reunite with their children’s fathers and the development of forms of love narratives. For example, women’s in-depth narratives on how LRA commanders “protected” and provided them with basic necessities like food, clothing, and babysitters during captivity allowed women to see these commanders as father figures, “protectors” and persons worth continuing deeper long-term relationships of love with. This was the case with some women who reunited with their children’s fathers. While some thrived, most of such relationships failed over time. As women’s stories have indicated, even if many LRA commanders were brutal, some were not, offering care for their women, a responsibility expected of them within the LRA system. Further, women’s stories illustrated that there were elements of courtship with the commanders even if such courtship may be contested given the coercive environment of war it happened. This was the case with Laber and Larem, whose stories introduced Chapters Four and Five respectively.

8.2 Methodological Contributions to the Study of Conflict-Related SGBV

This study also makes methodological contributions, especially to the literature on research methods and ethical research with vulnerable persons. I have drawn on African knowledge systems to guide my examination of the women’s lived experiences and highlighted the significance of relationship building and participatory research approaches that entail working with participants as co-researchers. These contributions are linked to my previous methodological and ethical foundations of research with survivor groups. I expand below these contributions especially in the areas of participatory approaches, collaboration, dissemination, and validation in research.

272 These babysitters were often young, abducted girls who later became ting tings or wives to either the same LRA commander whose children they baby sat or another commander within the brigade.
8.2.1 Participatory and Collaborative Research

My study was participatory from the design, implementation, and conclusion stages. As discussed in Chapter Three, I partnered with community-based, survivor-led organizations in Uganda. These organizations were founded and operated by women who experienced and survived wartime forced marriage and sexual violence. The Women’s Advocacy Network (WAN) was particularly significant in recruiting participants for the study and organization of all kinds of meetings both consultative at the design phase, and research meetings during implementation. My own pre-existing working relationship with this organization and their members demonstrated an effective strategy for a successful qualitative research approach.

Further, my research worked with survivors as co-researchers, referring to them throughout the dissertation as participants. This adds to the literature that advocates for cessation of extractive research relationships, and encouragement of a collaborative relationship and active involvement of research participants in knowledge production (Bouka 2015; Merriam and Tisdell 2016; Pope 2020). For example, the consultative meetings conducted during the proposal writing stage and at the initial stage of fieldwork allowed the participants to articulate why the research was important to them, and consent, as an act of agency to voice their perspectives to a wider audience. The WAN members stated that they understood their collaboration in this research as an opportunity to clarify their justice and reparations needs and why they make the decisions they make in relation to commanders. Women also saw this collaboration as a means to document their experiences and perspectives in a manner that can be used for their advocacy and overall struggle for recognition, compensation and justice.

Another methodological contribution of the thesis was adaptation of traditional Acholi methods of sharing and exchanging knowledge through *boko lok I wang oo* (storytelling around a bonfire), what Bagele Chilisa (2017) referred to as African methodologies. Chilisa notes that African and Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies need to reclaim space within global knowledge systems. As I have demonstrated through this research, the use of African methodologies such as storytelling contributes to the reclamation of this space by showing that these methods are significant in generating pragmatic and academic knowledge driven by people
directly affected by violence such as SGBV in this case. For instance, women in the WAN have employed such methods to date in their own work. So, it was a familiar form that resonated with respective methods employed within the community to enable people to speak their truth through communal knowledge sharing. This builds on my years of work of holding dialogues, use of dance, song, drama, and other forms of community building activities by the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP) and WAN to bring people together to discuss challenges and sensitive topics in post war settings. To add, the oral history interviews resonated with Acholi method of storytelling where participants narrated stories of their lives uninterrupted, determining what was important for me to learn about their senses of justice and reparations. These methods effectively worked to capture women’s perspectives on justice and reparations.

My study also demonstrates an ethic of care and beneficence that was made possible by a grant from the UBC Public Scholar’s Initiative (PSI). Through the PSI, I was able to offer, after completion of the fieldwork and data analysis, a one-off economic contribution to seven women’s groups including the five that participated in the study. This support was delivered by WAN, Watyer Ki Gen (WKG) and my research assistant Moses Komakech in June of 2021. These kept the research relationship ongoing during the last phase of dissemination of findings of the project. Clarifications were given to the women that these incentives were not intended to pay them for information shared but rather, to acknowledge their contributions to knowledge, research conducted and to boost their already existing village savings and loan associations (VSLAs) initiatives.

\[273\] In relation to my university ethics requirements, my study is regarded complete as of June 2021. But as an Acholi, my relationship with these women, that existed even before the project will continue. [274] I put special attention and followed BREB ethical guidelines [https://ethics.research.ubc.ca/sites/ore.ubc.ca/files/documents/BREB_Guidance.pdf](https://ethics.research.ubc.ca/sites/ore.ubc.ca/files/documents/BREB_Guidance.pdf), regarding incentives and compensation. These incentives were offered after the research process was concluded in 2021. Therefore, the incentives did not influence recruitment or consent to participate.
8.2.2 Dissemination and Validation Activities

Between May 31st and June 1st, 2021, I conducted a validation and dissemination workshop with survivors and stakeholders in a hybrid event that convened more than seventy total participants. The workshop aimed at disseminating and validating results of the study to participants and various stakeholders in Gulu district-northern Uganda and to develop recommendations for policy advocacy on issues of justice and reparations for survivors of wartime sexual violence and forced marriage. I collaborated with the WAN and WKG in organizing and conducting the workshop. These two organizations carried out a radio talk show as part of the dissemination and awareness creation activity during June 2021. A policy report and a podcast are outputs from this collaboration that will continue to spread the findings of the study and influencing policy change.275

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275 The report and the podcast are in final stages. They will both be completed by early 2022.
This event was relevant given that Uganda approved a national transitional justice policy\textsuperscript{276} in 2019 that provides a framework for delivering justice and reparations in Uganda after the various civil wars fought since its independence from the British colonialists in 1962. These results are also timely considering the February 2021 ICC conviction of Dominic Ongwen, one of the LRA commanders, on war crimes and crimes against humanity, including SGBV. Since the ICC judgement was announced, I have spoken on justice panels discussing Ugandan reactions to the ruling that demonstrates both victory and failures of the prosecutions. The ICC Trust Fund for Victims (TFV) in Uganda attended the event and connected the two partner organizations to entities submitting requests for reparations to the court. I supported the two organizations in drafting their requests for reparations paragraphs and shared findings of the study with the TFV to inform their efforts towards reparations for war-affected persons in relation to the case of Ongwen. Further, policy makers that attended the event such as the woman MP of Gulu District, Honourable Betty Aol Ocan, committed to taking up the issue of reparations with Ugandan government and Parliament. This is a successful impact of the research that drew attention of policy makers and highlighted the work of these two community organizations as significant in changing the lives of survivors of conflict-period sexual violence and forced marriage.

During the dissemination workshops, women reported that some of their colleagues have died without any form of justice or reparations, and it is a sad reality. Women also appreciated the opportunity to listen to the findings before it is finalised and to hear how I am presenting the stories they told me. They noted that research would be more meaningful if all researchers returned results to them the way I did. For further feedback on the research from workshop participants, see appendix D.

8.3 Policy and Pragmatic Contributions and Recommendations

The study places the issues, concerns, and interests of sexual violence survivors in post violence settings into a framework that informs program and policy actions on justice and reparations. This is a contribution to program and policy delivery on justice and reparations for wartime sexual violence and forced marriage. For example, the ICC TFV’s attention and invitation of the survivor organizations to join submissions for reparations and policy maker’s verbal commitments to follow up on advocacy informed by the study’s findings illustrates this contribution.

It is also recommended that transitional justice (TJ) theory and practice channel its attention and resources to survivors’ living needs and move away from the current focus on primarily prosecuting perpetrators, to understanding victims’ senses of justice by adapting a bottom-up approach. TJ also needs to revisit narrow definitions and categories of who is a perpetrator and who is a victim, but rather develop justice mechanisms that focus on seeking to understand who plays what roles in a conflict, under what circumstances, and how they can be accountable for those roles. For example, how can men who fathered children during the war be held accountable to responsibilities of raising these children beyond legal prosecutions. Lived justice and TJ processes can complement each other. For example, ensuring part of TJ resources go to meet the basic everyday needs of survivors so that they live dignified lives, could make them more interested and understanding of how other forms of TJ mechanisms sustainably address their suffering. Arguably, if the legal justice system in Uganda was working effectively, in a timely manner, and in ways that do not further disempower survivors, perhaps women’s senses of justice would have called for more of such initiatives as they are all supposed to intersect to ensure meaningful justice is achieved for SGBV survivors. There needs to be a balance in how formal justice mechanisms are undertaken with what senses of justice mean for survivors of wartime sexual violence. A balance between pursuit of lived justice and other forms of justice, including formal and cultural mechanisms like Acholi traditional justice systems, in complementary ways. Let justice be lived and experienced before one grows old or even dies.
The study concludes this section with the following policy and program recommendations generated by participants at the two-day validation and dissemination workshop:

**To the Government of Uganda:**
- Offer an official apology for harms women endured, and for the failure to protect.
- Provide interim reparations for women and their children born in captivity. Some survivors are dying, and many are unable to afford their very basic needs such as housing, food and school fees for their children who need not miss their youthful education years.
- Create a comprehensive reparations law and provide gender-sensitive and transformative reparations following the interim reparations. This should be conducted as part of the current TJ policy. Reparations should involve provision of specific livelihood initiatives, land, education, and vocational skills training for children born in captivity and their mothers.
- Table a motion on stigma in the Parliament. As noted throughout this dissertation, stigma remains one of the biggest reintegration challenges for women and their children. It is imperative for the government to find a lasting solution to this problem through policies.
- Conduct a robust reparations program for all war-affected persons in northern Uganda as the ICC reparations will be limited to Ongwen’s case and crimes committed after 2002.
- Intentionally package development programs to meet the specific needs of women and their children. These programs include the National Agriculture Advisory Services (NAADS), the Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan (PRDP) and others.

**To the International Criminal Court:**
- Pay reparations and consider children born in captivity as a special victim category.
- Ensure reparations go directly to survivors and their representatives without bureaucracy.
- Reparations should include provision of medical services to women and their children, and the communities they live in to avoid deepening divisions and the already endured stigma.

**To Ex-LRA Combatants and Fathers:**
- Take full responsibility of caring for and raising their children including payment of their school fees. Mothers reported that girls have become victims of early marriage and
pregnancy due to limited opportunities to live descent lives with support of both parents and
the communities. In the words of one mother during the workshop, ‘we need justice from our
children’s fathers too.’\textsuperscript{277} This responsibility should not be used to claim full custody of
children by their fathers who for a long time abandoned them. Ker Kwaro Acholi (KKA)
should come up with a bylaw that regulates this responsibility of fathers.

- Apologise to the women they forced to be their wives and mothers to their children.

**To the Acholi Community with Leadership of Lawirwodi, Rwot David Onen Acana II:**

- Ensure total acceptance of women who survived sexual violence and forced marriage, with
their children. This should involve championing awareness and attitude change campaigns at
grassroots and national levels.
- KKA should ensure spiritual redress as justice is unachievable without spiritual aspects.
  Building on the cultural ceremonies discussed in Chapter One, the KKA institution should
  embrace evolutionary and innovative approaches to accommodate specific justice,
  reparations, and healing needs of the women—including those connected to land.
- *Lawirwodi* should take lead in recognition and full acceptance of the women and their
  children by communities they live in and the government.
- KKA should take lead in advocating for improved land access and ownership by women and
  their children as this enables placed-based senses of justice. This can involve coming up with
  a bylaw that calls upon each clan to apportion land for women and their children instead of
  rejecting them.

**To Civil Society Organizations:**

- Increase momentum on TJ processes and scale up awareness on the policy in Uganda.
- Victim groups and their leaders should unite and work together as a team advocating for a
  common cause. About five victim-led organizations participated in the workshop and agreed
  to continue working together for justice and reparations for them and their members who
  survived sexual violence and forced marriage.

\textsuperscript{277} Participant at survivor’s validation and dissemination workshop, Gulu town, May 31\textsuperscript{st}, 2021
• Scale up community awareness through dialogues in all avenues such as churches, schools, and other forums to end social stigma and encourage full acceptance of women and their children who had been rejected due to their abduction experience.
• Provide psychosocial support to address trauma women and their children still experience due to wartime SGBV.

To The International Community, Including the United Nations:
• Condemn violence against women and children in war.
• Mobilise resources to support reparations and justice efforts in Uganda.
• Support efforts to end LRA activities in neighbouring countries so that sustainable peace is guaranteed for Uganda and its neighbours.

Figure 19: Participants at the validation workshop in Gulu 2021
(Photo by Moses Komakech)

8.4 Limitations and Areas of Further Research

I believe that results of the study depict what participants deem acceptable, respectful, and reflective of their stories and lived experiences. As someone who worked with participants before writing this dissertation and knowledgeable of the research context, I did my best to think
through my results and presented them in what I considered the most relevant language
reflexively and analytically. This study was not just months of fieldwork since the start of my
doctorate, but it is also an ethnographic account of my work with the women since 2006 in
Uganda, and my own lived experiences of the war.

Grounded in an approach that values lived experiences, senses of justice as lived could have
wider implications for SGBV experienced in other African countries. For example, the many
cases of SGBV considered through a justice lens as documented during the war in Sierra Leone
(Nowrojee 2005; Jain 2008; Park 2006), forced marriage and sexual violence recorded during the
Rwandan genocide (Bunting 2012; Jain 2008; Kalra 2001; Koomen 2013), in the Democratic
Republic of Congo (Baaz and Stern 2013) and other parts of the continent. Further, lived justice
can inform policy and programs for other kinds of violence experienced during the war in
northern Uganda like massacres, abductions, and child soldiering. But it should be noted that
survivors of wartime sexual violence have various experiences that may call for different kinds
of justice, and their senses of justice may evolve or change overtime depending on what their
critical needs are by the time of a particular study or redress mechanism. In other words, senses
of justice as lived compels a rethinking of what justice really means for SGBV survivors and
illustrates Goodmark’s (2015) perspective that justice has different meanings for both people
who define and seek it.

However, the study was limited by its focus on women alone despite an awareness that focusing
on men would add rich perspectives in knowledge development on issues of redress for wartime
SGBV. But men were not intended samples of this research because I wanted to develop an in
depth and complex understanding of women’s lived experiences and perspectives on justice and
reparations. Further, my previous contextual knowledge allowed me to analyse women’s
narratives longitudinally, and I had an existing relationship with the women and their
organizations that enabled a meaningful and collaborative research process as discussed.
Additional research should focus on men’s perspectives on sexual violence and forced marriage
in northern Uganda as this will provide a complete picture of how and why the LRA engaged in
these forms of violence. This research can inform better and inclusive program and policy design
that addresses both women’s and men’s experiences of SGBV during the war in northern Uganda. It will also be significant in advancing work that scholars have conducted in Uganda with men in the LRA that demonstrates that men also perceived themselves as victims of the LRA violence and need justice that includes recognition and compensation, that women in this study articulated (Aijazi and Baines 2017; Denov et al. 2019; Schulz 2020).

Further, children born in rebel captivity emanated as an important survivor group during this research because most of their mothers’ decision making on whether to continue or end relationships with their fathers depended on them. Additionally, women’s senses of justice and reparations were often linked to the children. For example, women wanting land or place-based justice to have a home for their children, compensation, and needs-based justice, and making decisions that enable their children to have access to education and decent housing. Children’s views on legal prosecutions of former LRA commanders who double as their fathers, for crimes committed against their mothers, is something to focus new research on. It would be important to learn what they think of the institutions of justice working with their mothers and fathers as they relate to their own experiences, identities, and circumstances of births.

Another limitation of the study was that the views of relatives and community members where the women live were not sought. These communities and families of participants were directly affected by the rebel activities that the commanders did. Women and their children have been blamed for the war, rejected, and still experience stigma related to these blames. A study that seeks to apply lived justice theory to the experiences of war-affected communities in northern Uganda as it relates to their own experiences of war can unearth new knowledge. Pluralistic and everyday senses of justice as lived remains relevant to members of societies grappling with consequences of violent conflicts because it aims at recognizing humanity, repairing harm, rebuilding relationships, restoring dignity, and holistically delivering everyday justice.
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in Uganda.


Appendices

Appendix A  Categories of Study Participants

A.1  Breakdown of all research participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>Participant Category</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Women survivors</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Key informants</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grand total of all participants in the research: 68

A.2  Breakdown of key informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Religious leaders</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Cultural leaders</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>NGO representatives</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Survivor-led organizations</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Political/government leaders</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Grassroots leaders</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A.3. Breakdown of oral history interview participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Date of abduction</th>
<th>Date of return</th>
<th>Number of children</th>
<th>Reunited or not</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lagulu</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Reunited but left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Labol</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Did not reunite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Langec</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Did not reunite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Lagum</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Reunited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Aleng</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reunited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Larem</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Lakalatwe</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reunited but left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Laber</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reunited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Atuku</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Did not reunite</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B  Guiding Questions

B.1  Questions for oral history interviews

Section 1: Background Information

1. Tell me about yourself?

   Probes: (a) When she was abducted and when she escaped. (b) how many children do you have? (in captivity and since return. (c) How many co-wives did you have? (d) Are you married or single? How long have you stayed with him after reunion or current relationship? (e) Level of education prior and post abduction. (f) Any skills training received since returning home?

2. Can you please describe how your current life is?

   Probes: (a) What do you do for a living? (b) Do your children live with you or somewhere else? (c) Does the father of your children give support or not?

3. How would you describe your relationship with the following categories of people?

   Probes: (a) your children, (b) the father of your children (how was the relationship while still in captivity and post return?), (c) your family (mother, father, brothers and sisters), (d) your in-laws (if applicable), and (e) your neighbors and larger community where you currently live?

Section 2: Decision Making on Reunions or Non-Reunions

4. I understand that after you escaped abduction and return home, some people reunited with the father of their children born in captivity while others did not. Tell me of that time when you made the decision to go back or not?

5. What factors influenced your decision-making to go back or not?

6. If you were to make these decisions all over again, would you still make the choice you made? Why or why not?

7. What is a significant moment in your relationship with the father of your children you were forced to be with?

8. What would be chapters in your book if you were going to write about your life?

Section 3: Justice and Reparations

9. What does justice mean to you?

10. What is it that needs to happen for you to feel that you have attained justice?

11. What does reparation mean to you?

12. Who needs to do what for you to feel that you have received reparations?
B.2 Questions for focus group discussions and storytelling circles

1. I understand that after you escaped abduction and return home, some people reunited with the father of their children born in captivity while others did not. Can you please share with me your experiences?
2. Why did you make this decision (to go back or not)?
3. What challenges do you face with regards to motherhood and marriage?
4. What does justice look like for you?
5. What does reparation look like for you?
Appendix C Maps

C.1 Map of Uganda

C.2 A woman’s life map

This map shows a woman’s life from arrival at the barracks on escaping captivity, transfer to World Vision rehabilitation center, return to their home (gangwa) and to her own home (ganga).
Appendix D  Feedback from the Validation Workshop 2021

Members of parliament in Acholi, they don’t talk about this problem because our own parents have rejected our own children. Our own community has rejected them. This is the biggest problem that we have….Ketty has actually done very well. According to me, I give her 90%- Religious Institution Representative

I want to thank you Ketty for following up on how you had left us and bringing back the results of your research. Secondly, I want to thank you for this meeting where you put WAN and Wayye Ki Gen. It shows unity among the survivor’s networks. Since you left, there has not been any change. So, I encourage you to continue working with us until we achieve change. I want to thank you so much to organizing an event like this, thank you. - SGBV Survivor

Ketty, I think your research is the result of very ethical approach that honors the stories and the women who tell them and so represents a form of justice and action as an act of solidarity. - University Professor

Ketty thank you so much for your presentation I will be able to validate that report and tell you that it’s excellent and confirm my conversation with you during your data collection. … I remember in my conversation with you, I mentioned how sexual crime and how sexual violence has been the major big issue that affected our women. I mentioned that the war in northern Uganda was fought in the body of the women and that the body of the women became battlefield for this war. Your research is action oriented with real and practical recommendations for the women survivors of war-Women’s Rights Activist

Thank you very much Ketty for your report, I totally agree with your findings. It presents the situation on the ground. When you titled your report as lived justice, it speaks to me about your transitions when you go to the community you will agree with me that the justice needs of these women 10 years ago is never the same with the justice needs of these women now and they may not be the same in the next 5 years-Civil Society Organization Representative

I want to associate myself and probably the institution with the findings of Ketty and say it is by and large a reflection of what happened in Northern Uganda and therefore it is not a problem validating most of what she has done…. Sometimes justice is considered inconclusive if the spirit or divine dimension are not addressed. We could be talking about place base, need base, compensation, relationship-based but there is a lot left out which have to be handled through the elaborate system which have been developed over the years. There’s a lot that we have to do to repair the divine bridges that happened around these women with the children or everybody who have been involved directly or indirectly in the conflict. So, handling them at material level or reparation at material level may leave a lot of glaring gaps which continue to become a vacuum dealing conclusively with the question of justice -Acholi Cultural Institution Representative

Thank you very much Ketty for your research. Your findings really resonate with most of us who come from northern Uganda. You have really asked questions that have been ignored for so many years and by so many people-Legal Institution Representative
Thank you very much Ketty for the great work done… It adds on the literature about the conflict in northern Uganda but also adds on the evidence about the facts that happened in northern Uganda. Most times when efforts are made to reach the government or other stakeholders about the issue of northern Uganda, they ask- ‘where is the evidence.’ So, this research adds to …evidence of what happened in Uganda. I like the way you brought out the justice as needs-based, place-based, need-based, compensation-based and relationship-based means. This links to the real issue - Human Rights Organization Representative

Thank you for sharing your research, Ketty. A great presentation and very conceptually rich work. I learned a lot- PhD Student

I really love the concept of lived justice. It resonates with me. When I think of Ogwen in the ICC, I often ask, whose justice is it serving? - Civil Society Organization Representative

Excellent research and presentation. Everyday justice. Exceptional work. - University Professor

Ketty, your work is so powerful and yet necessary. Thanks for highlighting and amplifying our needs and voices from the experiences of the formerly abducted women. - University Professor

I like the particular attention you have on the complexity of the topic, including relationships with former partners/abusers.- Postdoctoral Researcher

Ketty, you have presented the meaning of justice for the women in a way that seems to truly reflect what is needed. These are important findings that are valuable and translatable at so many levels. - University Professor

Thanks, Ketty for a great, clear, and important presentation that centered the perspectives of the women on justice and for the organization of this dialogue that brings together the perspectives of various stakeholders and looks toward concrete actions to take. - University Professor

Ketty wonderful study and very comprehensive, I know that war affected women and a few men came to parliament to let their issues be addressed but it was not as comprehensive as this. Some of us thought that PRDP (peace, recovery, and development plan) would be able to respond to the issue of our children. From the study, it cannot just be PRDP. It is more than that…justice should be holistic. Many times, we thought that it is about compensation, …..When they say justice should be lived, they should be supported not only by parents, but holistically….. I am ready to be part of follow up of this study….Thanks Ketty for this excellent piece of work. It will help us a lot in this eleventh parliament which is about to open. I would like to observe that we have Acholi parliamentary group, we have greater north parliamentary group with whom we can circulate this document to help us to push for an Act. We need an Act of Parliament on the national transitional justice policy. The policy is already there. So, we need the law which is still lacking….. if we work together, this piece of research of Ketty will move us many steps ahead and it will also help us in coming out with the law which is going to address the transformative justice programme or policy. - Member of Parliament