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**SCALED VIOLENCE:  
A FEMINIST GEOPOLITICS OF POST-WAR DEVELOPMENT  
IN NORTHERN UGANDA**

A Dissertation in  
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by  
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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation offers a feminist geopolitical examination of post-war development programs in northern Uganda. I argue that the tendency for peacebuilding programs in the region to focus primarily on protecting local women from the violent men in their domestic lives is part of complex geopolitical processes that reinforce gendered and racialized geographies of difference. This approach to peacebuilding isolates ‘local’ forms of violence rather than illuminating the ways in which the local exists in and through its connections with differently scaled processes including aggression perpetrated by the state, by international actors, and via the multiple violences of militarization and development. I contend that this narrative of ‘local’ violence promotes the scaled and gendered categories of protector, victim, and aggressor upon which to military and post-war development interventions are designed. In this dissertation, I examine the negotiations of these geographies of difference in people’s everyday lives in northern Uganda to contest both the assumed violence of the local and the implied benevolence of those claiming the role of protector.

Empirically, this dissertation is based upon a year of ethnographic research in northern Uganda. Theoretically, it draws from and contributes to the literatures of feminist theories of war, critical development studies, and feminist postcolonial scholarship to answer the following questions: How do war narratives shape the development of post-war interventions? How are gender regimes implicated in promoting the narratives and practices of both war and peacebuilding? And what can an analysis of embodied experience tell us about how systems of violence transverse the war/post-war

transition? Ultimately, this dissertation offers a feminist geopolitical analysis of the narrative of local violence and the protectorship triad by examining how identities are produced, politicized, and manipulated in relation to projects intended to bring peace and development to a particular region. By using the lens of everyday experiences, this dissertation contributes not only to the identification of the oppressive potential of the protectorship triad but also the opportunities it provides for alternative strategies to fight violence and oppression.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Development and security are inextricably linked. A more secure world is only possible if poor countries are given a real chance to develop. Extreme poverty and infectious diseases threaten many people directly, but they also provide a fertile breeding ground for other threats, including civil conflicts. Even people in rich countries will be more secure if their Governments help poor countries to defeat poverty and disease by meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

-UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan (United Nations 2004, vii)

*Peace begins at home.*

-slogan on t-shirts distributed throughout northern Uganda

UN Secretary-General Annan's statement encapsulates the logic behind post-Cold War era international interventionism; this logic holds that security and development are intimately linked and that by ensuring both, the best interests of the international community will be served (United Nations 2004; World Bank 2011). Interventions based on this logic aim to develop the social, political, military, and economic infrastructures of 'conflict-prone' areas so as to foster peace and prevent future violence (Boutros-Ghali 1992). How one defines peace, security, and development, however, greatly affects the design of such interventions. In northern Uganda, after decades of fighting between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Government of Uganda, post-war peacebuilding programs focus almost exclusively on familial and community violence. This focus combines with contemporary trends in women's rights programming amongst non-governmental organizations (NGOs) so that while advocacy against sexual and gender based violence is common amongst NGOs throughout Uganda, it is only in the north that

creating peace in the home is tied to preventing war. What does this indicate about national and international assessments about the drivers of conflict in the region? What challenges and opportunities does it present for people living in northern Uganda? In asking these questions, I am not denying the important and significant gains of advocacy around sexual and gender based violence. Rather, I query the primacy of women's rights, women's empowerment and sexual and gender based violence advocacy within these historically and geographically situated post-war peacebuilding programs.

This dissertation offers a feminist geopolitical examination of the gendering of post-war peacebuilding programs in northern Uganda to argue two interconnected points. First, that there is a narrative of local violence that characterizes national and international explanations of the war between the LRA and the Government of Uganda. This narrative, particularly the Ugandan state's version, relies upon gendered and racialized geographies of difference to blame the war in northern Uganda on the violent masculinity of the Acholi ethnic group. The narrative of local violence continues into the post-war period as national and international actors design peacebuilding programs to address interpersonal and community-level sources of violence. I will demonstrate how this narrative contributes to a notable lack of peacebuilding addressing national or international processes and actors.

The portrayal of the local as the source of violence contributes to the second aspect of this dissertation's argument – that military and development interventions are designed around the scaled and gendered categories of protector, victim, and aggressor. The victim and aggressor are scaled as local; they exist in the site of violence. The victim is feminized as passive through her assumed need for protection against the aggressive

masculine other that threatens her. The protector is an active masculinized role of assumed benevolence. Within the narrative of local violence, protectors are scaled as national, international, or somehow separate from the local. By disconnecting themselves from the local sites of violence, these actors position themselves as the purveyors of peace and thus not implicated in the violence affecting the region.

In this context, peacebuilding programs focus on protecting local women from the violent men in their domestic lives can be understood as part of complex geopolitical processes that reinforce gendered and racialized geographies of difference. While a focus on everyday gendered forms of violence is generally laudable from a feminist perspective, I argue that the localization of peacebuilding activities in this context is problematic as it promotes a very narrow definition of violence. It defines local violence as almost exclusively interpersonal in nature. In so doing, it isolates the local rather than illuminating the ways in which the local exists in and through its connections with differently scaled processes including aggression perpetrated by the state, by international actors, and via the multiple violences of militarization and development.

This particular narrative of violence and the peacebuilding programs associated with it are a product of specific historical and geographic contexts. Therefore, after outlining the research questions that drive this dissertation, I offer an introduction to a few aspects of this context relevant to this dissertation. I begin with a discussion of the post-Cold War development of international interventionism. I then provide a brief history of the war in northern Uganda divided in two parts. The first portion is an overview of the timeline of the war and its major players. The second section provides a

place-based history of the war based on three features of the landscape around Odek village. The final portion of this chapter provides an outline of the dissertation.

### **Research Questions**

Throughout the course of this dissertation, I use a feminist geopolitical lens to examine the connections and disjunctures between everyday experiences and the national and international narratives of violence in northern Uganda. In so doing, I address the following research questions:

- 1) How do war narratives shape the development of post-war interventions?  
What are the connections between the geographic understandings of war and development in northern Uganda?
- 2) How are gender regimes implicated in promoting the narratives and practices of both war and peacebuilding? In particular, how does the paternalistic logic of protection inform the construction of ‘total interventions’?
- 3) What can an analysis of embodied experience in the war-affected region tell us about how systems of violence transverse the war/post-war transition? How does such situated knowledge challenge state-based and international definitions of security and development? What alternatives does it present?

By investigating the above questions, this work offers a place-based analysis demonstrating how local processes are implicated in, but not determined by, national and international discourses and practices. To begin orienting the reader to the specific

context of post-war peacebuilding in northern Uganda, I turn now to a discussion of international interventionism as realized in the post-Cold War era.

### **International Interventionism**

The post-Cold War era has seen major shifts in mainstream international understandings of both war and development. During the Cold War, conventional international politics focused primarily on the threat of massive interstate conflict. Following the collapse of the Communist Block, new sources of violence gained attention within international political circles. In the 1990s, concern for new threats to the prosperity of liberal states focused on escalating ethnic conflict in, for example, Yugoslavia and Rwanda that stemmed from tensions thought to have been held in check by Cold War geopolitics (Van Creveld 1991; Boutros-Ghali 1992; Freedman 2001). The ‘new wars’ theory emerged from these circumstances in the 1990s, arguing that new wars, as opposed to ‘old wars,’ are a distinctly post-Cold War era type of conflict that is not fought between states but, rather, is internal to state boundaries and funded through transnational systems of support (Kaldor 2007). According to this theory, new wars are characterized by a focus on identity politics, usually ethnic or religious. These wars employ low-intensity tactics meant to dominate and control populations through fear and hatred. In their analysis of the new wars rhetoric, Hewitt and Duffield (2009) write that in the transition from ‘old’ to ‘new’ wars, “we’ve gone from fear of violence from the largest economies to the smallest” (p.16). Hence the modalities of underdevelopment (eg. poverty, resource competition, and weak or predatory institutions) became dangerous

within this theory's narrative; conventional views cast them as potential causes of new wars (Hewitt and Duffield 2009).

It was in this historical moment that then-UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali unveiled *An Agenda for Peace*. As part of a new interventionist agenda for the UN, peacebuilding was meant to lay the foundation for durable peace by developing social, political, and economic infrastructures that would foster peace and prevent future violence in conflict-prone regions (Boutros-Ghali 1992). According to Boutros Boutros-Ghali, "Our job [as the UN] is to intervene: to prevent conflict where we can, to put a stop to it when it has broken out, or- when neither of those things is possible – at least to contain it and prevent it from spreading" (1998). This was a notable shift from the UN's Cold War era prioritization of state sovereignty and practices of non-intervention.

This new interventionist approach to peacebuilding, combined with the focus on the intra-state conflicts of the new wars, put pressure for development institutions to address violence in their work. This led to the promotion of what Branch (2011) calls 'total interventions' in the mid-1990s. Branch contends that the total intervention framework invoked by international agencies is based on the idea that violence leads to the breakdown of social order in a number of domains, including the political, economic, legal, social and cultural. These social breakdowns have the potential to create further violence, thus establishing a circular logic in which any deviation from international norms of peace and stability indicate potential violence. Thus, in the post-Cold War era of interventionist international relations (Boutros-Ghali 1992), this logic morally obligates actors, who consider themselves more developed and more peaceful, to intervene. This nexus of security and development provides a road map for such



interventions as it promotes the assumption of development's ability to reduce poverty and thereby contribute to the reduction of social breakdown and conflict (Anderson 1999; Collier 2003).

The oft repeated notion that there cannot be security without development nor development without security continues to circulate in the 2000s. The rhetoric of the security-development nexus pervades national and international policy making (eg. UNDP 2000; Solana 2003; United Nations 2004; OECD 2007), think tanks (eg. Hurwitz and Peake 2004; CIDSE 2006), and academic literatures (eg. Uvin 2002; Menkhaus 2004; Buur, Jensen, and Stepputat 2007; Duffield 2010; Hettne 2010). However, there is little consensus within these literatures about the character of the connection between security and development (Stern and Öjendal 2010). Attempts to control the meaning of the security-development nexus have material effects as the power of definition over 'security' and 'development' implies the power to define a field of reference and the material practices and resources associated with it (Chandler 2007).

Critics of the new international interventionist approach to peacebuilding and conflict management argue that it supports the status quo of international relations (eg. Hewitt and Duffield 2009; Branch 2011). Roland Paris (1997) contends that peacebuilding is an "enormous experiment in social engineering" in which Western models of liberal peace, based on political and economic liberalization, are transplanted into war-torn states to control civil conflict (p.55). Similarly, Richmond (2007) critiques the liberal peace arguing that such definitions of peace are in fact a form of 'orientalism' in which more enlightened and rational actors know what peace is and can create if for those that do not. According to Richmond:

This implies that actors involved in conflict are somehow inferior, deluded, or obsessed by violence, identity claims, power, territory or resources. ...Conflict is not seen as a structural indicator, but as a dysfunctional form of behavior that can be modified if the correct political economic, social, and development approaches are adopted. (p.5-6)

Such critiques highlight how international interventionist peacebuilding perpetuates unequal social relations in the name of bringing peace and development to a population that is seen as neither peaceful nor developed.

Although international attention to violence beyond narrowly-defined times and spaces of war has the potential to support progressive agendas, this dissertation is cautious of the contemporary enthusiasm for 'total interventions' (Branch 2011) which purport to address the multiple needs of conflict-prone regions. Consequently, I contribute to the above critiques by demonstrating how peacebuilding interventions maintain patriarchal structures at multiple scales. In so doing, I offer a uniquely feminist geographic intervention that highlights the gendered, racialized and scaled narratives of conflict that locate the causes and consequences of violence in particular places. These narratives function to obscure international and transnational systems of violence. Furthermore, I argue that contemporary interventionist peacebuilding is supported by a patriarchal logic of protection. Following this logic, the UN and other international agencies establish themselves in the paternalistic role of the protector who knows what is best for a conflict-ridden population. It is particularly noteworthy that this new form of interventionist peacebuilding has occurred during an era where violent conflicts are understood to be predominantly intra-state affairs in developing countries. International discourses of development and modernity are intertwined with understandings of war and peace in these contexts.

This dissertation excavates the geographic narratives of difference inherent to total interventions while also mindful of the opportunities provided by new trends in international development that connect the concepts of security and development. By demonstrating the constructed and contestable nature of the discourses of security, peace and development, this dissertation challenges masculinist processes and power structures without dismissing the importance of what security, peace and development mean in people's everyday lives. I thereby offer a feminist critique of interventions that, on the surface, address the very concerns that feminist scholars and activists have advocated for decades: attention to complex systems of violence, alternative definitions of security, and the gendered nature of development. This dissertation uses the lens of everyday experiences to identify not only the oppressive potential of peacebuilding interventions but also the opportunities they provide for reimagining social relations.

Attention to the everyday is central to feminist geopolitical analyses which challenge universalist claims through an examination of the complexity and diversity of lived experiences. Historical and geographic specificity are therefore vital to any claims made regarding geopolitical processes. For this reason, I now turn to an historical overview of the war in northern Uganda which will take the discussion out of abstract theories of new wars and international interventionism and into the specifics of the situation in northern Uganda.

### **The War in Northern Uganda: An Historical Overview**

During the colonial period (~1896-1962) in the region that would become Uganda, the British implemented a divide and rule colonial policy. The southern Bantu-speaking groups, particularly in Buganda, were portrayed by the British as more civilized than their northern neighbors. The southern groups tended to have hierarchical political structures that British colonials used to create a colonial administrative class which in turn facilitated the collection of taxes and control of the population (Branch 2011, 47). In contrast to this, the Luo-speaking groups of northern Uganda were characterized by decentralized political structures, particularly in the region that would come to be known as Acholiland. The difficulty of mapping colonial administration onto the extant power structures in the region (Mamdani 1996) eventually led to violent attempts to pacify the north (Kabwegyere in Branch 2011). This administrative separation between the south and the north was reinforced by the colonial claim that the northerners represented a martial race. This racialization legitimized the location of political and economic power in the south which led to the decline of northern economies. The northern population was subsequently used as labor reserves for southern economic projects as well as recruits for the police and army (R. R. Atkinson 1994). This division of labor led to the creation of a military ethnocracy (Doom and Vlassenroot 1999) that was popularly understood to be the manifestation of the Acholi's innate warrior identity.

This colonial north/south imaginary of difference was reinforced in the post-colonial period by Yoweri Museveni and his National Resistance Army (NRA) during their rebellion against President Milton Obote's regime in the mid-1980s. Museveni

strategically invoked the north/south narrative as a way to blame Obote (who was from the north) for the violence of the rebellion as well as bring together formally divergent groups of southern Uganda (Branch 2011). In so doing, he reified the image of northerners, particularly the Acholi, as primitive warriors who threatened the modern nation-state. Upon taking power, Museveni and his National Resistance Movement (NRM) party maintained this north/south divide as central to their national politics. They excluded Acholi from national power, suppressed independent local leadership, and launched a military counterinsurgency operation in the north at a time when there was no insurgency (Branch 2011).

The northern rebellions that eventually developed to fight Museveni ranged from formally trained soldiers from the previous regime, such as the Ugandan People's Defense Army (UPDA), to spiritually motivated popular uprisings, most notably Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Movement (HSM). What these groups had in common was a motivating meta-narrative of betrayal in which the Acholi were not only isolated from political and economic power but purposefully singled out for persecution (Bøås 2004). In 1987, as other rebellions ended via defeat or negotiation, Joseph Kony and the rebel force that would come to be known as the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) attracted former members of other rebel groups. While Kony's personal reputation was built upon his claim to have spiritual powers, this influx from other rebel groups augmented his spiritual leadership with the military tactics and training of former UPDA rebels.

While ostensibly fighting the government, the LRA became infamous for anti-civilian violence. This violence increased in the early 1990's and was targeted at suspected government supporters as well as the general civilian population in order to

bring it under the rebel's authority (Branch 2011). It was also during this period that the LRA increasingly turned to the kidnapping children as a way to fill its ranks and create a 'new Acholi' that supported the mission of the LRA. As the LRA increasingly persecuted the Acholi people (Finnström 2008), the north/south explanation for the war was slowly supplanted by the story of a north/north conflict between the LRA and Acholi civilians (see figure 1.1). In this new narrative, the geographic imaginary of the war was isolated to the north, and other parties, especially the Ugandan government, were not held responsible for the war's causes or its resolution. The racialization of the Acholi as warlike became even more accentuated with the amplification of anti-civilian violence. Military representatives blamed violence in the region on the cultural background of the Acholi ethnic group saying the violence was "genetic" (Human Rights Watch 1997, 59). The colonial assertion that the Acholi were "primordially violent" (Finnström 2008) was strategically reappropriated by non-Acholi actors in the post-colonial state to discredit northern uprisings or claims on the state.

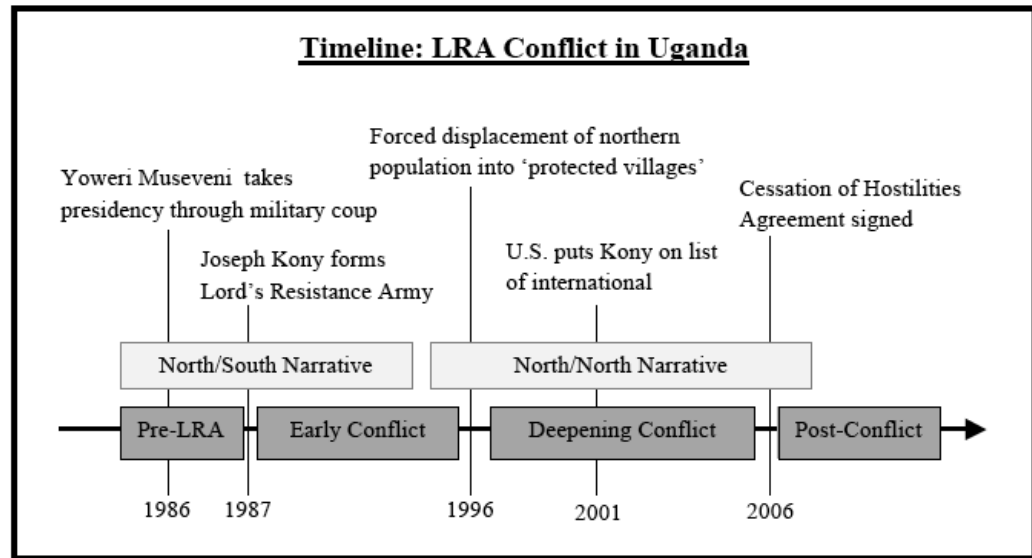


Figure 1-1: Timeline of LRA Conflict in Uganda

In the mid-1990's, the then Minister for Pacification of the North, Mrs. Betty Bigombe, attempted to broker a peace deal between the LRA and the army. The collapse of talks in 1994, however, led to a resurgence of violence on both sides. In 1996, the Government of Uganda began forcefully relocating people in the war torn region from their homes to 'protected villages' to isolate them from the rebels. While the government maintains that this forced displacement protected civilians, the lack of security or basic services in the 'protected villages' made it clear that the primary security concern was to secure the state by physically separating Acholi rebels from Acholi civilians, who were assumed to be collaborators due to their shared ethnic identity (Mwenda 2010). Lived experiences of insecurity for the displaced population stemming from armed violence, lack of access to potable water and food, as well as rape and child neglect increased due to the displacement (Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative 2001; Weber, Rone, and Human Rights Watch 2003). In effect, the displacement was social torture meant to

simultaneously punish the Acholi and discipline the rest of the nation (Dolan 2011). The Acholi served as an example of what would happen to those that did not support the current regime. President Museveni's government used the war in northern Uganda to discipline this population and to demonstrate national sovereignty at a time when international economic policies were dictating the national budget (Mwenda 2010). Thus the war was productive of the consolidation of state authority in relation to both domestic and international politics.

The LRA war in northern Uganda can also be read as part of a proxy war between Sudan and Uganda during which the Uganda supported the southern Sudanese rebellion against the Sudanese government while Sudan supported the LRA war against the Ugandan government (Prunier 2004). During the same period, the Ugandan army was active in Rwanda (Prunier 1995) and the Democratic Republic of Congo; for these conflicts, northern Uganda was used as site of recruitment (Dolan 2011). This regional conflict reverberated across the globe to the U.S. War on Terror. Following the 2001 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City, President Museveni pledged Uganda's support for the War on Terror, and when the Bush administration released a list of international terrorists, it included Kony and the LRA. Since that time, the U.S. has provided financial and technical support for Uganda's military actions throughout Eastern and Central Africa.

In 2006, a new peace process based in Juba, Sudan, led to a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement between the LRA and the Government of Uganda. However, no final peace accord was signed. The talks dissolved in part because of the unprecedented International Criminal Court's (ICC) 2005 issuance of warrants for the arrest of Joseph



Kony and four of the top officers of the LRA. It marked the first time the ICC had indicted individuals during an ongoing conflict. While the geopolitical motivations for the ICC's indictments are beyond the scope of this summary, a motivating factor of Kony's refusal to sign the final peace accords was uncertainty around the status of these warrants. Instead, he and the LRA began a nomadic existence, moving between the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic and South Sudan, that continues to this day. Yet even as the LRA have dwindled to merely a couple hundred individuals, the LRA and their connection to the Acholi ethnic group remains at the center of many discursive constructions of the violence in the region, a topic which shall be further explored in Chapter 4.

The history of the war offered thus far focuses on traditionally defined geopolitical actors. It is the story of governments, state militaries, and rebel armies. While such a history is useful to orient a reader to the mainstream narrative of the war, it fails to acknowledge the multiple histories and geographies that were created through the processes of war. To address this shortcoming, I turn to my experiences working in Odek sub-county to offer a distinct yet complimentary history of the war.

### **The Landscape of Odek: A Place-Based History of the War**

In this section, I provide an overview of key moments and events of the war via readings of the landscape in the Odek sub-county of northern Uganda. I chose Odek because it is the area where I conducted a significant portion of my research including my

collaboration with members of MOK<sup>1</sup>, a community-based human rights organization (see map in Chapter 3). MOK stands for Mon Odek pi Kuc (Women of Odek for Peace); the original members of the group came together while living in the Odek displaced persons camp in 2005. MOK is currently a group of approximately 80 individuals, predominately but not exclusively women. Their experiences and perspectives provide the foundation for many of the critiques in this dissertation, therefore it is from their stories that I draw a place specific history of the war. This is not a history separate from the one outlined above, but rather a historically and geographically specific version. To frame this place-specific history, I use three features of the landscape in Odek: an empty yellow house, three trees on ridge, and a signpost in the grass.

### **The Yellow House**

On the edge of Odek village stands a yellow house. A rectangular structure with cement walls and a metal roof, this house's yellow paint is still bright although a little dirty at the bottom from where mud has splashed on it during multiple rainy seasons. The most noticeable aspect of this house, besides its yellow color, is that it stands empty and abandoned. One day my friend Abitimo told me that it belonged to her uncle. I knew her uncle and had visited him in a different home a bit further down the road, so I asked her the story behind this yellow house. She handed me a cup of lemongrass tea to sip while she told me the following story of the yellow house:

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<sup>1</sup> The names of organizations, such as MOK, and individuals with whom I worked have been changed for the purposes of anonymity. Public figures such as President Museveni remain unchanged.

*Many years ago, before Yoweri Museveni was the president, he was being chased by members of the army loyal to President Milton Obote. Museveni was a target because he was building a rebel army to overthrow Obote. He called this army the National Resistance Army (NRA) and it eventually became the foundation of his political party, the National Resistance Movement (NRM), but this would come later. For now, Museveni was on the run in northern Uganda. This was Obote's home region, home of the Acholi, and enemy territory for Museveni since he was building support for the NRA by claiming the northerners were the source of the country's problems. But at some point in the mid 1980's, Museveni found himself in Odek in his attempts to outrun Obote's army. Abitimo's uncle took him in and gave him protection. Knowing that was putting his life in danger, he protected Museveni for many weeks. Not long after, in 1986, Museveni led the NRA in a violent coup d'état. Museveni assumed the presidency and began persecuting anyone associated with Obote's regime. Many former soldiers fled to northern Uganda where they formed militias to fight Museveni and his new NRM government. In the years of violence that followed, general opinion in northern Uganda held Museveni responsible for the political and economic marginalization of the north as well as the continued violence. Given these circumstances, when Museveni decided to thank Abitimo's uncle for his support and protection by building him a new house, her uncle could not live in it without being associated with Museveni and being seen as an enemy. For him, it was safer to let the beautiful new house stand empty than to be seen as an ally of Museveni.*

This empty yellow house stands on the side of the road as a constant reminder of the complicated history of connections and disjunctures between northern Uganda and the rest of the nation-state. Given the politics of the situations, it did not make things any

easier for Abitimo's uncle that Museveni painted the house bright yellow, the color of the NRM party.

### **The Three Trees**

If you look south from Odek village, you will see three trees standing together on the top of a ridge. These three trees mark the place where Joseph Kony was born and raised. Kony was not a particularly noteworthy boy. There are many stories of him as a mediocre student in the local primary school, as someone who liked to play soccer, as a distant cousin seen at family gatherings. But that all changed in the mid 1980's. Kony disappeared into the wilderness for awhile, and when he came back, he spoke of spirits and visions. People were impressed with his new found ability to predict the future, to know things about people's lives that no one else knew, and to cure diseases. The spirits that used him as a medium gave him powers that others did not have. Then one day Kony received a vision telling him it was time to take up arms against Museveni and fight for the Acholi people. Akulu was there on the day Kony made this vision public and asked for volunteers to help him. She tells the following story:

*Kony called a meeting before going into the bush (wilderness) to fight. The meeting was like a prayer meeting since Kony had started behaving like a prophet. Two things happened during this meeting that proved to people Kony had supernatural powers. First, he chose four young children and put them in the four corners of the homestead and said they would determine where he would start fighting. Unprompted and in unison, all four children pointed west. But still not everyone believed Kony nor*

*took him seriously. When rain clouds started to approach the gathering, some people suggested they all depart. Kony told them not to worry, that it wouldn't rain on them. And it did not. It rained all around them but not a drop fell on the people gathered. This second demonstration of Kony's power convinced many of his abilities.*

Joseph Kony went on to form the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The LRA would become infamous for kidnapping of children to turn them into soldiers and sex slaves. From the beginning of the LRA in the late 1980's until the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement between the LRA and the Government of Uganda in 2006, the people living in northern Uganda were caught between a rebel army targeting the civilian population and a government army that saw the region as enemy territory. While the dynamics of this conflict will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, for now I wish only to note the emotional ambiguity associated with those three trees on the ridgeline. They represent the home of a family member, a spiritual leader, a freedom fighter. They also represent the home of a murderer, a serial rapist, and an international terrorist.

### **The Signpost**

The grasses have grown so high it's almost difficult to make out the signpost positioned on the side of the road. This hand painted placard reads: MOK – Mon Odek pi Kuc - Human Rights Association Office. It is hard to pick out which building is the MOK office as it is one of the many small circular buildings with grass thatch roofs that used to be part of the Odek IDP camp. This camp was one of dozens of 'protected village' created by the Government of Uganda during the war. When talking about the origin of

MOK, its founding members always start with the conditions of their lives as shaped by the war, the forced displacement, the presence of international NGOs, and the government's militarized engagement in the region.

Life in the IDP camps was incredibly difficult. There wasn't adequate food, services or security leading to widespread disease, conflict and extreme hardships. Violence, theft and child neglect were part of everyday life. The government and NGOs collaborated to construct camp leadership structures in an attempt to manage the realities of such densely concentrated populations. Due to the prioritization of female leadership by the NGO's, a few of the future leaders of MOK rose to the top of these structures. Some of the women who gained authority through such structures had held positions of authority previously (one had been a commander in the army), but for most, it was their first opportunity to be in a formal leadership position.

As a camp leader or a women's leader, individuals were invited to participate in a wide range of trainings and informational programs. International NGO's and their local implementing partners often required people to form groups to receive trainings and/or resources. Following international trends, many NGOs focused their work on women's empowerment and women's groups. In an attempt to take advantage of this trend, a group of forty-five women from Odek came together to fight the child neglect and other forms of violence that were so rampant in the camps. They sought out an NGO that would support them and help them realize their agenda. This proved significantly more difficult than they had expected. Most NGO's wanted to form women's groups that supported the NGO's specific organizational goals; it took many months before MOK found a human rights organization that would work with them.

Since that time, MOK has expanded to over eighty members including some male elders and youth. The IDP camps have been officially closed and most individual and families have dispersed across the landscape. Yet MOK members continue to address issues of concern in their communities ranging from domestic violence to land disputes to access to education. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, their successes and challenges are embedded in the complex social terrain in which they work. For example, their reputation for impartiality is connected to their determination to remain a volunteer organization where members do not get paid for their work. However, this creates additional burdens on the women and men in MOK who are responsible for the welfare of their families. Every time they mediate a dispute or walk miles to do an educational program, they are taking time away from working in their fields or running their businesses. The volunteer nature of their work is an economic burden. Nevertheless, every day MOK members are working in their communities. Every day the little wooden signpost gets put out by the road.

The above vignettes are but glimpses into the complexities of life in a war zone that get lost in the meta-narratives of traditional geopolitical accounts. By using a feminist geopolitical lens to examine geopolitical processes through such everyday spaces and experiences, I disrupt the narratives of local violence that permeate national and international depictions of the war in northern Uganda. I show how the distinctions between protector, victim, and aggressor become much less clear in practice than they are in the narratives produced by those claiming the role of protector. I do all of this through attention to gendered and racialized geographies of difference.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

In this dissertation, I offer a feminist geopolitical analysis of the post-war landscape in northern Uganda. To clarify the theoretical and empirical contributions of such an analysis, I begin Chapter 2 by demonstrating the unique contributions made by a feminist geopolitical analysis that draw upon everyday experiences to critique geopolitical narratives that privilege the international scale and the primacy of traditionally defined geopolitical actors. The remainder of Chapter 2 situates my geopolitical analysis within feminist theories of war, critical development studies, and feminist postcolonial critiques of Western interventions. I highlight the political nature of the category ‘war’ by drawing upon the work of feminist scholars who show how systems of violence connect times of war to those of supposed peace (eg. M. Cooke 1996; Cockburn 2004; Sjoberg 2006). I also draw upon this literature to find the militaristic roots of the protectorship triad – the gendered roles of protector, victim, and aggressor (eg. Young 2003; Coleman 2007).

I then turn to critical development studies to show how the paternalistic logic of protection is incorporated into development as well as military interventions. I argue that the ‘will to improve’ (Li 2007) driving many development projects promotes a form of trusteeship reminiscent of militaristic protection. The paternalism of this logic relies on racialized as well as gendered narratives of difference. For this reason, I turn to feminist postcolonial critiques of the ‘Third World woman’ trope to demonstrate the centrality of processes of racialization in the construction of gender. I also draw upon this scholarship to critique the assumed passivity of those in the role of victim through theories of



embedded agency. When combined with a feminist geopolitical analytic, these theoretical interventions provide the analytic tools to study the protectorship triad as scaled categories based upon gendered and racialized geographies of difference active during both war and post-war periods. Throughout this analysis, I emphasize how the constructed and contested nature of identity – both for people and places – is implicated in the geopolitical processes of the post-war landscape of northern Uganda.

While I provide theoretical justification for the study of the everyday to investigate geopolitical processes in Chapter 2, I demonstrate the implications of such an approach on the design of feminist research attentive to uneven power relations and the politics of ‘speaking for’ others through the research process in Chapter 3. In this chapter I explore debates amongst feminist scholars regarding methodological issues to clarify and justify my specific approach to research. In particular, I explore the tensions around feminist research as the study of women and women’s issues, the prioritization of experiences over objectivity, and the concerns regarding representation and imperialism. After a discussion of these methodological concerns, I turn to the specific qualitative methods I employed during the course of this research. I describe my use of ethnographic observation, semi-structured interviews, and secondary document analysis. I also provide a description of my research sites and an explanation of the three phases of my research. I conclude with reflections on the limitations of the research.

I begin Chapter 4 with the empirical analyses of this dissertation. It provides a feminist geopolitical reading of the war narratives associated with the conflict in northern Uganda. It investigates how state-based definitions of protection and security contribute to lived experiences of violence and insecurity in northern Uganda through the combined

processes of militarism, racialization, and the relational construction of masculinities. By demonstrating how these protectionist narratives of security actually lead to an increase in the experiences of insecurity by those supposedly being protected, this chapter contributes to feminist geopolitical studies which question the state-based definitions of security. The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section identifies the racialized and gendered narrative of local violence deployed by the government to explain the violence of the war. The second section provides four examples of how the racialized narrative of violence translates into increased experiences of violence and insecurity for the northern population. The final section examines the experiences and performances of masculinity to further challenge the narrative of local violence. To undermine the militarism and racialization of violence linked to this narrative, these previous two sections expose geographies of insecurity produced through the discursive and material practices associated with the narrative of local violence. Whereas the government casts the male population of northern Uganda into the role of aggressive masculine other to explain the violence in the region, I draw upon relational theories of masculinity to argue that the violence perpetuated by civilians during the war was a result of the conditions of the war. The state-based promotion of a hegemonic militaristic masculinity reduced the opportunities for performing non-militaristic masculinities. Increased violence amongst the civilian population, therefore, was a result of the war not a cause of it.

While I present the construction of an aggressive masculine other in the state's version of the protectorship triad in Chapter 4, I switch my focus within the triad in Chapter 5 to the role of protector by examining the multi-scalar processes of creating and

contesting the role of protector. This chapter also shifts from a focus on war narratives to post-war processes of peacebuilding and development. This chapter examines how multiply scaled actors – local, national and international – draw upon the paternalistic logic of protection to assert their own claims of authority in the dynamic landscape of post-war peacebuilding and reconstruction. I explore the collaborations and negotiations between these variously scaled actors in an analysis of the complex relations of masculinity that characterize peacebuilding programs throughout the region. Empirically, I support this argument through analyses of post-war planning documents, institutionalized peacebuilding practices, and the controversies around women's rights. Collectively, these foci demonstrate how the categories of 'protector,' 'protected,' and 'aggressor' are subtly morphed in the post-war period to legitimate various claims of protectorship as well as relations between protectors. Given the hierarchical relations of power integral to these processes, I show how peacebuilding programs perpetuate systems of violence and oppression in the name of peace.

Having established how the scalar categories of protector, victim, and aggressor persist through both militaristic and development-style interventions, Chapter 6 asks what happens when violence is fought by a women's grassroots organization whose identity is tied to the very location that is associated with masculine violence? What opportunities and constraints does this situation present? By focusing on the heterogeneous agency of MOK, a resource poor, rural group of women and men in northern Uganda, this chapter addresses these questions by offering a feminist geopolitical analysis of everyday negotiations of violence to challenge state-based definitions of security. It makes visible the connections between interpersonal conflict and structural violence that are obscured

by the narrative of local violence. It also undermines the disavowal of the rural population's agency implicit in the paternalistic logics of protection and empowerment. This denial of agency occurs through a patriarchal logic that feminizes a particular population by creating them as passive and subsequently in need of protection and guidance. Thus the analysis of MOK's work in this chapter unsettles the paternalistic logic of protection as the members of MOK do not fit neatly into the role of passive victims; they are constantly expressing their agency by fighting, coping with, and/or perpetrating interpersonal and structural violence.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I summarize my findings in three thematic sections. In the first section concerning the logic of protection and total interventions, I review how paternalistic logics of protection connect military interventions to post-war peacebuilding programs. I then discuss the relationship between security and identity to underscore the role of identity in justifying interventions meant to promote particular forms of security for particular groups of people. In the third section, which concerns agency, violence and protection, I return to the work of MOK to challenge narratives of protection through an analysis of place-based negotiations of violence noting the limitations as well as future directions for this research. I conclude by clarifying the contributions of this research to feminist geopolitics via the use of everyday experiences to critique the narrative of local violence and the protectorship triad as it is realized in northern Uganda.

## Chapter 2

### Framing a Feminist Geopolitical Analysis

Conflicts are maintained at multiple spatial scales – local, national and international; to acknowledge “place” is to enable women and men to move past their experiences of conflict and transform these places.

–Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman (2004, 7)

This dissertation examines violence through a feminist geopolitical lens by using everyday experiences to challenge state-centric discourses of security and protection. It contributes to the work of feminist scholars, such as Giles and Hyndman, who interrogate the importance of spatial processes in perpetuating and contesting systems of violence. In particular, it critiques the narrative of local violence that permeates both military and development discourses in the post-war landscape of northern Uganda. This scalar narrative produces the local as a site of violence and positions national and international actors as potential purveyors of peace. Within this narrative exists a triad of subject positions: the protector, the victim, and the aggressor. While the protector position within this narrative can be scaled as national or international, the victim and aggressor are invariably scaled as local. To maintain this distinction, gendered and racialized geographies of difference are mobilized by those claiming the role of protector. In this dissertation, I examine the negotiations of these geographies of difference in people’s everyday lives in northern Uganda to contest both the assumed violence of the local and the implied benevolence of those claiming the role of protector.

This feminist geopolitical analysis is informed by theoretical insights from feminist theories of war, critical development studies and feminist postcolonial theories of violence. Each of these literatures provides tools to engage with a specific aspect of the

post-war landscape of northern Uganda. Feminist theories of war offer critiques of protectionist discourses related to military interventions. Critical development studies challenge the normative claims of conventional development narratives. Postcolonial theories of violence make the connections between narratives of difference and systems of violence. When combined through a feminist geopolitical lens, these literatures illuminate systems of violence that connect wartime military interventions to post-war peacebuilding and development programs through processes of othering across scale. In this dissertation, I focus this analytic force on the paternalistic logic of the protectorship triad to make visible the multiple insecurities produced in the name of peace and development for northern Uganda.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into five sections. I begin by clarifying the approach to feminist geopolitical analysis I employ and the tools such an approach provides to a study of post-war landscapes. The next three sections bring the feminist geopolitical analytic into conversation with feminist theories of war, critical development studies, and feminist postcolonial critiques of the ‘Third World Woman’ trope. In these sections, I highlight what each field contributes to and gains from an engagement with feminist geopolitics. I also demonstrate the utility of joining them in a study of post-war processes. This sets up the fifth and final section in which I offer my intervention of international and national discourses that link war and development in so-called ‘conflict-prone’ regions. I contend that mainstream approaches to managing northern Uganda as a ‘conflict-prone’ region perpetuate the paternalistic logic of the protectorship triad. In making this argument, I bring together the contributions of feminist theories of war,

critical development studies, and feminist postcolonial theories of violence established earlier in this chapter to develop a unique feminist geopolitical intervention.

### **Feminist Geopolitics**

Feminist geopolitics developed in response to the assumptions of both classical and critical geopolitical analyses. According to classical geopolitics, the world can be explained, understood, and ultimately controlled as a result of analyzing the political relations of nations and states (Flint 2012). Geopolitics, following this logic, is the field of geography's contribution to state-craft and the consolidation of state authority (Mackinder 1904). Critical geopolitics, which took hold in the 1990s, challenges the state-centric focus of classical geopolitics to expose the biases and political agendas of classically defined geopoliticians (Simon Dalby 1991; O'Tuathail 1996; Flint 2012). Although critical geopolitics is generally unsympathetic towards state-building projects, it still maintains a focus on traditionally defined geopolitical actors. It is into this landscape of geopolitical analyses that feminist geopolitics makes its intervention.

Like critical geopolitics, feminist geopolitical analyses decenter the state and make connections between power relations at multiple scales. However, drawing heavily upon contemporary work on the social and political construction of scales (eg. Cox 1998; Marston 2000; Brenner 2001; Herod and Wright 2002), feminist geopolitical scholars argue for the investigation of everyday and seemingly 'apolitical' spaces as sites of significant geopolitical analysis (Lorraine Dowler and Sharp 2001; Staeheli and Kofman 2004; Sharp 2007). To be clear, feminist geopolitics is not just a focus on women

(Lorraine Dowler and Sharp 2001) or a privileging of the local (Secor 2001), but, rather, a means of linking “international representation to the geographies of everyday life” (Lorraine Dowler and Sharp 2001, 171). It is, as Dowler and Sharp (2001) argue, a “lens through which the everyday experiences of the disenfranchised can be made more visible” (p.169). A feminist geopolitical approach ultimately critiques masculinist geopolitical narratives that focus on the state, privilege the international scale, and play the ‘god-trick’ of a disembodied view while actively building alternative geopolitical narratives and practices (eg. Lorraine Dowler and Sharp 2001; J. Hyndman 2004; Pain and Smith 2008).

Within the larger project of feminist geopolitics, this dissertation focuses on the role of scale in creating and perpetuating geographies of difference. Consistent with the epistemological approach of feminist geopolitics, I study this phenomenon from the everyday spaces of people living and working in northern Uganda. To make the connections between such ‘local’ spaces and processes scaled as ‘national’ or ‘global’, I turn to feminist geographic theories of place and scale. Historically, geographers have promoted the idea of place (‘the local’) as static entities, inward-looking enclosures with fixed meaning and singular identities (Massey 1994). Feminist and critical geographers critique such a perception of place for its tendency to obfuscate the construction and maintenance of hegemonic power relations at multiple scales and make it difficult to imagine the means by which to change them (Massey 1994; Cox 1998; Herod and Wright 2002). Instead, they argue for a relational understanding of scales in which the local is not only connected to the global, but implicated in its production (Massey 1994; McDowell 1999; Marston 2000). It is from this theoretical position that feminist



geopoliticians have studied geopolitical processes through embodied experiences (eg. Secor 2001; Hyndman 2007; Pain and Smith 2008; Fluri 2011; Williams 2011).

This dissertation contributes to the feminist geopolitical project of challenging the assumed priority of the global or international scale by answering Nicley's (2009) call for a more explicit engagement with feminist theories of place in geopolitical analyses. In particular, I draw upon feminist theories of place and identity which highlight the contingent nature of identity and the co-constitution of local and global processes that produce said identities (Massey 1994; Rose 1995). These theories allow me to make the connections between the narratives of northern Uganda as a site of 'local' violence, national and international peacebuilding interventions, and gendered and racialized geographies of difference. Massey (1994b), for example, draws upon Foucauldian notions of the subject to argue that there is a resonating effect between the identity of places and the identity of subjects within them in which each shapes and is shaped by the other. Processes of othering, therefore, can simultaneously shape the identity of places and the individuals in those places. In the case of northern Uganda, gendered and racialized processes of othering link to narratives of local violence in which 'the local' is understood as a static entity rather than a relational category. Such narratives of violence are dangerous because they essentialize the identities of both places and the people associated with them. They produce 'Africa,' 'northern Uganda,' or 'the Acholi home' as places of conflict and underdevelopment and the people associated with them as conflict-prone and underdeveloped.

I ground this feminist geopolitical analysis in these theories of scale, place and identity. Within them I find the theoretical justifications for a study of multi-scalar

geopolitical processes in the everyday spaces of life and work in northern Uganda. In the next section, I combine the analytic tools of feminist geopolitics with feminist theories of war to disrupt state-centric definitions of security and make visible the multi-scalar systems of violence that blur the war/peace binary.

### **Feminist Theories of War**

To examine a post-war landscape, as this dissertation does, it is necessary first to understand the meaning of the label of ‘post-war.’ Typically, the term ‘war’ conjures images of armed conflict between armies, often associated with territorial conflicts between or within states. This image is consistent with a classical geopolitical analysis of war as process of state-craft (Mackinder 1904; Owen 2000; Ramsey 2002). While such a perspective positions war as part of a political project, it does not question the category of war. In feminist theories of war, however, the very process of labeling particular forms of violence as ‘war’ is understood to be a political project (Cock 1993; M. Cooke 1996; Sjoberg 2006). The label of war invokes what Cooke (1996) refers to as the basic ‘war story,’ the gendered assertion that men are strong and therefore they must protect the women who are weak.

This narrative of protection, which is a key focus of this dissertation, differentiates between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ masculinities in the name of protecting a feminized population. Puar and Rai (2002) demonstrate how such threats to the nation are understood through racialized and sexualized narratives of difference. Policing masculinity via its connections with race and sexuality can therefore be used to control

and bound national spaces; hegemonic projects of masculinity use the ideals and practices of masculinity as tools for the purification of both borders and populations (Theweleit 1987; McClintock 1995; Banerjee 2005; do Amparo-Alves 2009). In respect to Uganda, I will show how the racialized narrative of northern Uganda as violent is used to discipline the northern population and delegitimize their claims on the state.

The struggle between ‘protector’ and ‘aggressor’ masculinities is predicated on the presumed passivity and defenselessness of the population to be protected (ie. the population’s feminized status). Young (2003) challenges this assumed passivity by arguing that some citizens of security states, such as in the U.S. post-9/11, actively choose to participate in the protectionist bargain. She argues that people give up decision-making power in exchange for protection from what they perceive to be a benevolent source. However, many feminist critiques of the protector/victim/aggressor triad, especially those coming from postcolonial feminist scholars, demonstrate that such assumptions of benevolence are not universal and many in the category of protected do not desire protection as it is offered (Narayan 1997; Abu-Lughod 2002; Hirschkind and Mahmood 2002). Instead, feminist scholars illuminate the hollowness of the ‘saving women’ trope by unpacking how gender intersects with race, sexuality and religion to further support militaristic security interventions which produce insecurity in women’s everyday lives (Abu-Lughod 2002; Bunch 2004; Fluri 2011b). In such works, the construction and maintenance of specific gender identities is shown to buttress state-building projects to define the boundary between insider and outsider. In so doing, these processes also legitimize particular forms of violence while labeling others aggressive and illegitimate (Ross 2008).

In northern Uganda, the assumption of a benevolent state never existed. Instead, there is a long standing meta-narrative of betrayal that characterizes the north's relationship with the nation-state (Bøås 2004). Although there is not popular support for the state-based protectionist bargain within northern Uganda (eg. Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative 2001), this does not negate the pervasiveness of the logic of paternalistic protection as a rhetorical tool and geopolitical project. The feminization of the civilian population as well as its assumed connection to deviant masculinity is used by state actors to control the narrative of the war and discipline the population.

Given that war functions more as a discursive label than as definable type of violence, then the question, as it pertains to this study, switches from *what* defines a place as in a period of war or in a post-war transition to a question of *who* defines a place as in a period of war or in a post-war transition. In the case of northern Uganda, the label of post-war could certainly be challenged. For example, the Lord's Resistance Army is still active in neighboring countries and could return at any time. Additionally, there are still high levels of structural and interpersonal violence in the region, not to mention the ongoing militarization of the Ugandan state. A feminist study of violence in northern Uganda, therefore, would question how the label of war is used by different actors to distinguish between types of violence.

Through such interrogations of the category of war, feminist scholars highlight the nationalist and state-based agendas that separate state-sanctioned violence from other forms of violence such as domestic violence (Borer 2009; Wright 2011; Chan 2011). They effectively trouble the war/peace binary by showing how the violence of war is not separate from the violence of everyday life (Cockburn and Zarkov 2002; Sjoberg 2006;

C. H. Enloe 2007). By demonstrating how gender regimes, processes of ‘othering,’ militarization, and economic systems of inequality blur the war/peace divide, feminist scholars have brought attention to the multiple forms of insecurity simultaneously produced and obscured by masculinist narratives of war.

This troubling of the war/peace binary informs feminist geopolitical analyses that challenge state-based definitions of war and security by asking the question of ‘whose security’ is being addressed (Hyndman 2004; Mountz 2004; Sharp 2011). Feminist geopolitics, in turn, offers a uniquely geographic contribution to these feminist theories of war through critical conceptions of scale that make visible how war narratives produce violence and (in)security beyond official times and spaces of war (eg. Dowler 1998; Katz 2006; Massaro and Mullaney 2011). In this tradition, I purposefully trouble the war/peace binary by investigating the intersection of war narratives and processes of development in the post-war period. This illuminates how multi-scalar gender regimes transverse the war to post-war transition and, in so doing, create multiple forms of (in)security.

Before proceeding to a discussion of development processes in relation to the above mentioned theories of war and violence, I pause to clarify key terminology as it relates to this analysis of violence. In troubling the concept of war, feminist theorists created a need for new terminology to describe types of violence and the multi-scalar processes that connect them. Cockburn (2004) suggests we switch our focus from war to security. In so doing, she contends we will be able to see a larger *continuum of violence* that ranges from gender violence of everyday life to structural violence of political and economic systems to armed conflict of open warfare. Holding on to the terminology of

war, Sjoberg (2006) argues for the need to understand war as a system rather than simply an event. She argues that a feminist study of *systems of war* will illuminate that:

...first wars start earlier and go on longer than traditional interpretations identify; second, wars reach deeper into societies than conventional reports would portray; finally, wars can be fought with a wider variety of means and by a wider variety of actors than previously imagined. (p.53)

In their different ways, both Cockburn and Sjoberg are challenging masculinist norms that separate types of violence in order to confine the violence of war to discreet times and places. Enloe (2007) makes a similar argument by switching the focus from war to *militarization* and making the links between gender, militarization and globalization explicit. She argues that although the globalization of militarization is not new, what is new is:

(a) the global reach of these business, cultural, and military ideas and processes; (b) the capacity of promoters of globalizing militarism to wield lethal power; (c) the fact that so many private companies are now involved in this globalization of militarization; and (d) the intricacy of the international alliances among the players. (p.8)

Enloe's work is illustrative of a feminist geopolitical approach which decenters the state while seeking to understand the implications of multi-scalar processes in spaces of everyday life.

Despite the different terminology invoked by these scholars, there is consistency in their challenges to the war/peace binary that assumes the violence of war is distinct from the violence of everyday life. Nevertheless, given the variety of potential vocabularies, it is necessary to define key terms I use throughout this dissertation. Drawing from feminist insights, I define *violence* as a social or political act which "may be physical, sexual, verbal, emotional or representational and may include interpersonal

and institutional actions” (Pain 1999, 286). While I specify modalities of violence as much as possible (eg. interpersonal versus structural), I refer to *systems of violence* to indicate the connection between various modalities across scale.

I will continue to use the term *war* with the understanding that it is a political marker deployed to characterize certain types of violence as abnormal and separate from normal ‘peaceful’ social relations. I employ Enloe’s (2000) definition of *militarization* as, “the step-by-step process by which something becomes *controlled by, dependent on, or derives its value from* the military as an institution or militaristic criteria” (p. 281, emphasis in original). An analysis of militarization therefore takes us beyond the actions of militaries and into complex social relations produced through and in relation to militaristic institutions and ideas. As a complimentary but slightly different concept, *militarism* is a militarized system and set of ideas which a society adopts to sustain peace and/or prepare for war (Dowler 2012; Elshtain and Tobias 1990). In this dissertation, I study processes of militarism as they contribute to social norms of masculinity and narratives of protection.

Feminist theories of war and violence disrupt the masculinist narratives of war by troubling the war/peace binary and making visible the connections between a wide range of violences. In so doing, they provide analytic tools useful for a feminist geopolitical examination of the post-war landscape in northern Uganda. In this analysis, I bring these tools into conversation with the insights of critical development studies because the peacebuilding programs of the post-war period in northern Uganda are shaped by the discourses and practices of international development. The post-war landscape is shaped by international and national interventions meant not only to address the immediate needs

of a wartorn population but also to create the economic empowerment of the same population through development programs. As mentioned in the introduction, this is consistent with contemporary trends in international peacebuilding and the security-development nexus.

This analysis of the intersections of militarism, peacebuilding, and development in northern Uganda contributes to a growing literature within feminist geopolitics that examines the intersections of war and development (eg. Jennifer Hyndman 2000; Cockburn and Zarkov 2002; Giles and Hyndman 2004; Fluri 2011a). This study offers new and unique contributions to this literature through the examination of the narrative of local violence and the scaled categories of protector, victim, and aggressor in the context of northern Uganda. However, before expanding upon this intervention, I first turn to a review of relevant work in critical development studies to ensure this theoretical framework is equally robust in the tools to analyze the discourses and practices of development as it is in tools to examine processes of war and violence.

### **Critical Development Studies**

Just as the last section started with an interrogation of war as a concept, this section begins by scrutinizing the meaning of development. The World Bank, a major player in international development discourses and practices, defines development as economic growth, stating that “raising per capita income and consumption are main goals of development” (World Bank 1999, 19). This definition is consistent with what Hart (2001) refers to as big ‘D’ Development, development which is “defined as [the] post-



second world war project of intervention in the ‘third world’ that emerged in the context of decolonization and the cold war” (p.650). This type of development is historically based upon theories of modernization (eg. Rostow 1960; Eisenstadt 1973), concepts of progress, and more recently, the ideals of neoliberalism. Although key actors in Development include the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Bebbington (2004) reminds us that mainstream Development norms and programming are not only done by external, international actors but are also practiced by actors within countries. This point will be important in later analyses of national and local forms of protectorship.

While knowledge of Development processes is useful in understanding the power-knowledge systems that perpetuate international development norms and discourses, I am not interested in debating the pros and cons of Development (see Ferguson 1990 for a review of these debates). Rather, for the purposes of this feminist geopolitical analysis, I find a study of little ‘d’ development more relevant. Little ‘d’ development, according to Hart (2001) is “the development of capitalism as a geographically uneven, profoundly contradictory set of historical processes” (p.650). This is consistent with McIlwaine’s (1998) definition of development as “a highly contested term broadly referring to economic, social, and cultural change, particularly among developing countries” (p.59). These changes create “contradictory and complex geographies of unscripted shifts in economies, societies, investment, production, debt, political alliances, and transnational alliances” (Lawson 2007, 57). This understanding of development fits into a feminist geopolitical approach as everyday spaces become a key site of analysis to understand the complex geographies of the multi-scalar processes of development.

Having established the general concepts of development that I will be working with, I now switch to identifying the specific analytic tools of critical development studies applicable to this study of narratives of violence, scale, and paternalistic social relations in the post-war landscape. According to my research, the narrative of local violence in northern Uganda is not restricted to military discourses. It also permeates post-war development programming. To understand how this narrative functions in development, I turn to Roe's (1991) conception of development narratives not as assertions of truth, but as "caricatures of reality" that tell a story without pretense of accuracy (p.296). They are not expected to account for everyone's experiences of development processes or even the majority of experiences. The value of such narratives, therefore, is not their ability to reflect reality but, rather, that they "help to stabilize and underwrite the assumptions needed for decision making" (Roe 1991, p.289). So, for example, the post-war development narrative of local violence in northern Uganda provides an explanation for the underdevelopment of northern Uganda (local violence) which then becomes the platform for programmatic decision-making. Post-war development programs are subsequently designed to facilitate peacebuilding between local actors.

Through its focus on local violence as the cause of underdevelopment, the post-war development narrative of northern Uganda draws attention away from the state and international regimes while highlighting interpersonal relations at the community and household level. This scaled narrative of violence perpetuates a different political process than that identified in other contexts of development. For example, Ferguson (1990) speaks of the depoliticization of the state and poverty through development programs in

Lesotho. In that context, problems of development are defined in technological terms and thus improving development is a question of expert-led engineering. This approach effectively depoliticizes development by creating an ahistorical narrative of why the country of Lesotho lacks development – complex social issues are reimagined as technological challenges. In a different context, Li (2007) shows how development programs in Indonesia depoliticize the state and poverty through expert-led projects of settlement. Again, complex social relations are reimagined as an issue of the proper placement of the population and the rational use of land. In contrast to these and other examples (eg. Escobar 1995; Tsing 2011), my work demonstrates how, in a contemporary post-war scenario, historical narratives are very important in understanding underdevelopment. The lack of development in northern Uganda is understood as a consequence of historical processes, but only historical processes scaled as local. Thus, the state and international processes are depoliticized through a focus on violence scaled as local.

Interventions to address this assumedly local violence are connected to militaristic forms of protectionism found in periods of war. In this dissertation, I claim that they shift into a slightly different although complimentary form of paternalism in the post-war. To make this argument, I return to Li (2007) for her conceptualization of the ‘will to improve’. The will to improve is a form of trusteeship in which development actors feel a sense of responsibility for the well-being of those determined to be in need of development or, in this case, peace. The will to improve promotes itself as supportive and in the best interests of a target population. Hidden within this claim of support and empowerment, the will to improve draws upon paternalistic assumptions as trusteeship is

based on “a claim to know how others should live, to know what is best for them, what they need” (Li 2007, 4). In the post-war landscape, the will to improve combines with the narrative of local violence to reinforce the idea that violence can be abated through changes in the behavior of local actors. National and international actors take on the role of trustee/protector to empower local actors to fight local violence and thus facilitate development.

By examining the facilitation of ‘local’ peacebuilding projects, this dissertation contributes to feminist scholarship critiquing the Development industry’s focus on local empowerment programs. For example, the increasingly popular policies of international organizations to bolster local and grassroots movements and thereby appear to be more inclusive and democratic are, in effect, using “notions of grassroots, local and indigenous...constructed in ways that legitimize existing development policies and solidify the role of development actors” (Kotahri in MacKenzie 2009, 202). The promotion of local engagement in development programs is meant to empower local actors when, in effect, it is used by external actors to justify continued interventions. Also, due to the politics of funding, international Development assistance can affect the organizational identity of ‘local’ groups as they attempt to mold themselves to match the priorities of the funding agencies (Blacklock and Crosby 2004).

These findings contest the idea of ‘local’ or ‘grassroots’ movements which have been idealized by both the proponents of development (eg. United Nations 1996) and post-development theoreticians (eg. Escobar 1995). In both cases, local organizations are believed to represent ‘authentic’ organizing built upon participatory democracy and not corrupted by the politics of state and international systems. Local organizations, however,

are just as political as state organizations, the politics just tend to look different (Ferguson 1990) and therefore should not be relied upon as the antidote to inequality (Taylor 2000). In this analysis of local peacebuilding in northern Uganda, I contribute to feminist critiques of the idealization of the local by examining the politics of protectorship in multiple local organizations.

In summary, critical development studies provide tools to examine the distances between discourses of Development and lived experiences of development. They highlight the uneven politicization of development processes and the paternalistic social relations embedded in trusteeship. Combined with a feminist geopolitical analysis of scale, they show how drawing strict lines between ‘local’ and ‘global’ development processes and actors perpetuates inequalities. In the next section, I continue with this analysis of development discourses and practices but from a uniquely feminist postcolonial perspective. While not completely distinct from interventions of critical development studies mentioned above, a focus on feminist postcolonial critiques of the ‘Third World Woman’ trope facilitates the theoretical connections between processes of othering, violence and development that are fundamental to this dissertation.

### **Feminist Postcolonial Critiques of the ‘Third World woman’ Trope**

The focus on women’s rights and women’s empowerment in northern Uganda’s the post-war Development agenda raises questions about the role of women and gender in Development programs and development processes. Why are women’s issues of such consequence in the post-war landscape of northern Uganda? How does this fit into the

narrative of local violence? How does it contribute to and/or challenge systems of violence perpetuated by paternalistic social relations? To examine the complex and contradictory answers to these questions, I turn to the insights of feminist postcolonial scholarship.

Feminist postcolonial scholars critiqued early Western feminist interventions into Development programs for focusing on poverty, not oppression. In so doing, they claimed these Western feminists obscured the connections between global capitalist patriarchy and male violence. Writing for an international network of ‘Third World’ feminist researchers, Sen and Grown (1987) argue that:

systems of male domination...on the one hand, deny or limit [women’s] access to economic resources and political participation, and on the other hand, impose sexual divisions of labour that allocate them the most onerous, labour-intensive, poorly rewarded tasks inside and outside the home, as well as the longest hours of work. Thus when development programmes have negative effects, these are felt more acutely by women” (p.26).

For the purposes of this study, such a critique is useful as it highlights the multi-scalar systems of violence that shape women’s and men’s lives, connecting interpersonal to institutional forms of violence and oppression. Moreover, feminist postcolonial critiques of Development go further by making the connection between capitalism, patriarchy and racism. They argue that globalization, Development, and neoliberal policies are all co-constituted by patriarchy, racism, caste-ism, and other forms of social othering (eg. Cooke and Kothari 2001; Nagar and Sangtin Writers 2006; Erickson and Faria 2011).

In her ground-breaking work “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” Mohanty (1988) turns this critique onto Western feminist scholarship (and work in Development in particular) by arguing that it tends to produce

monolithic, universalizing and essentializing depictions of a singular ‘Third World woman.’<sup>2</sup> This ‘Third World woman’ “leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being “Third World” (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.)” (Mohanty 2003, 22). In this study of post-war peacebuilding programs, I show how this trope of the ‘Third World woman’ continues in the racialized assumptions of local violence that victimize local women. Building on Mohanty’s work which is directed primarily at Western feminisms, my work examines how the trope of a female population victimized by cultural violence is also mobilized by national and local actors in the post-colonial setting.

To avoid specious generalizations such as ‘Third World’ women or ‘Women in Africa,’ Mohanty (2003) calls for scholarship that is historically and geographically specific. She puts race and racism in the heart of feminist politics by showing how ideologies of masculinity, femininity and sexuality are themselves racialized. Racism, the discourse and practice of othering and inferiorising ethnic groups, was a key tool in the establishing colonial hierarchies (Said 1979). Feminist postcolonial scholars trace the legacies of racialization, “the representational process[es] whereby social significance is attached to certain biological and/or cultural characteristics” (Walter 1999, 226), from colonial practices to those of Development (eg. Narayan 1997; Nagar and Sangtin Writers 2006; Chowdhury 2006). Even though critiques of Euro-centrism and racism have been made repeatedly against Development (eg. Cooke and Kothari 2001; Nagar

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this chapter, I follow Mohanty’s (2003) lead by putting ‘Third World’ and ‘Third World woman’ in scare quotes to denote that this is a category that has been created by dominant discourses and does not reflect the identities or experiences of the individuals grouped in this category.

and Raju 2003; Wainwright 2011), they continue to be of importance due to the resilience of gender and racial inequities and the ways in which “the military/prison/cyber/corporate complex works to recolonize marginalized bodies” (Mohanty 2003, 173).

In this dissertation, I demonstrate how processes of racialization are used to construct both masculinities and femininities. The racialization of gender is used to separate ‘good’ masculinities from ‘bad’ masculinities (ie. protectors from aggressors) as well as construct the category of feminized victim. Interventions based on these racialized discourses are part of a larger set of Development programs postcolonial scholars critique for emphasizing the exotic ‘other’ (eg. female genital mutilation, stoning, and the burqua) rather than issues like poverty, civil war and health care (Tripp 2006). Such an emphasis reflects an imperialist mindset Narayan (1997) refers to as ‘death by culture’ whereby ‘Third World’ women need to be saved from their own cultures which are uncritically accepted as essential aspects of identity. In such cases, violent cultural traits are associated with masculine racial identities. Women, according to this logic, need to be protected from the violent men in their lives. Thus, feminist postcolonial theory provides an important connection between masculinity, racialization, and violence; it is a connection that will prove to be key to unraveling the narrative of local violence in northern Uganda.

Another critique levied by feminist postcolonial scholars relevant for this dissertation is the production of the ‘Third World Woman’ as victim. The status of victim in this context is one of vulnerability and passivity. ‘Third World Women’ are represented as having no agency and thus in need of protection. Feminist postcolonial scholars acknowledge the difficult and constraining conditions in which many ‘Third



World Women' live, but they refuse to accept this means they have no agency. Instead, postcolonial scholars have developed new theories of agency that highlight an individual's embeddedness within social structures. Based on her work in India, Menon (2004), argues that choice, as an expression of agency, can represent both free will and a lack of freedom. She contends that "what appears to be free will is *produced* by the operation of structures of power that hegemonise notions of right and wrong, of common sense, and of permissible solidarities" (p.209-210). According to Menon, the "the task of feminist politics, then, is both to enable the subject to act – to exercise that [free] will constrained by power structures – as well as to demonstrate that the will is truly free only when the structures that 'frame our desire' are exposed and dismantled" (p.210).

Mahmood (2005), drawing from her work in Egypt, cautions against the feminist tendency to glorify expressions of agency that resist structures of dominance and oppression. She challenges feminists to "think of agency not as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create" ((Mahmood 2005, 203). In both cases, an understanding of social contexts is necessary to understand and interpret expressions of agency. Western feminists that create 'Third World Women' as passive victims are thus shown to be unaware and/or ill-informed of the complex expressions of agency by women in 'Third World' contexts.

Collectively, these postcolonial critiques of the 'Third World woman' trope contribute to a feminist geopolitical analysis in that they bring attention to systems of violence that include discursive representations, structural inequalities, and the historic specificity of live experience. A geographic lens, in return, highlights how these systems

function through multiple scales and by connecting the identities of places and peoples. A feminist geopolitical analysis informed by postcolonial theory thus provides the analytic tools to examine not only historically and geographically specific manifestations of multi-scalar systems of violence but also the individual expressions of agency that shape and are shaped by such contexts.

In the final section of this chapter, I join the above critiques of the ‘Third World woman’ trope with insights from feminist theories of war and critical development studies to outline a feminist geopolitical critique of the narrative of local violence in northern Uganda. In so doing, I blur the war/peace binary to show how systems of violence connect processes of militarization and development.

### **Scaling Violence: A Feminist Geopolitics of Post-War Development**

In feminist theories of war and violence, the protectorship triad proves a useful analytic to denaturalize the hierarchical social relations associated with war and violence (Young 2003). It highlights how individuals and groups are discursively positioned in relation to one another and how these discursive positionings impact but do not mirror lived experiences. This dissertation advances feminist engagements with the protectorship triad by examining it spatially. Drawing upon feminist and critical geographic theories of scales as relational social constructs, I provide a geographic analysis of the protectorship triad as scaled categories. Viewing the triad through this spatial lens, the production of the three categories of the triad as distinct and separate entities is understood as a political project. The scalar construction of the triad is thus

shown to be implicated in efforts to solidify hierarchical and paternalistic social relations. It perpetuates traditional geopolitical narratives which prioritize the role of state and international actors while ignoring the agency of those classified as victims. This analysis interrogates the normalization of particular forms of violence via efforts to maintain a spatial distinction between aggressive and protective actions, but it does not dismiss the utility of the protectorship triad in fighting violence from a feminist perspective. Rather it interrogates the multiple spatialities and embodiments of the triad to offer a less hierarchical remapping of the relationships between protector, victim, and aggressor.

The paternalistic logic of the protectorship triad resonates with the paternalism of the ‘will to improve’ (Li 2007) within development discourses and practices. However, the ‘will to improve’ is based upon a binary relationship between trustees and a population in need of improvement. As development programming becomes more explicitly involved in peacebuilding as part of the post-Cold War era interventionist agenda, the trusteeship binary is not sufficient for capturing the complexity of relationships in development programming. Thus, this dissertation expands the analytic of trusteeship to include the distinction between victims and aggressors. This distinction is necessary to understand how development-style improvement programs are designed for a ‘conflict-prone’ population. Such a population is divided between potential victims and potential aggressors, with empowerment programs designed for the victims and conflict management skills for the aggressors. However, to understand how the distinction between potential victims and aggressors is made, I draw upon the analytic tools of feminist and postcolonial theory. I employ these tools to examine the gendered and racialized constructions of difference that inform the narratives of local violence

upon which such programs are designed. In so doing, I bring my scalar analysis of the triad into post-war development programming to make explicit the connection between military and development interventions in ‘conflict-prone’ regions.

Throughout my scalar analyses of the triad, I constantly draw upon feminist postcolonial insights regarding the racialization and gendering of both development and militarization. This scholarship provides the tools to challenge the construction of the aggressor as a masculine other as well as the assumed passivity of those in the role of victim. However, within feminist postcolonial scholarship there is a tension between the role of victim and understandings of agency. The victim position is theorized as inherently oppressive yet there are women and men who actively claim the role of victim in exchange for protection. Feminist postcolonial theories of agency contend that we must not dismiss such expressions of agency (Mahmood 2005) but rather query them to better understand the historically specific contexts in which they are embedded. In this dissertation, I interrogate the choice to claim the role of victim in order to examine the utility of the triad, including the victim position, within everyday negotiations of violence. In so doing, this dissertation offers a feminist geopolitical analysis of multiple spatialities of the protectorship triad that undermine the simplistic scalar categories produced by state actors and offer a reimagining of the triad as part of a feminist project.

## **Conclusion**

Interventions based on the narrative of local violence promote the idea that particular places, and the people connected to them, are ‘conflict-prone’ and in need of

interventions to avoid devolving into open warfare. This belief is reinforced by the new wars rhetoric that emphasizes how contemporary conflicts are ethnically or religiously motivated intra-state affairs. Similar logics are used in describing places and people as underdeveloped and in need of interventions to facilitate their development and empowerment. This dissertation offers a feminist geopolitical analysis to examine how identities are produced, politicized, and manipulated in relation to projects intended to bring peace and development to a region.

In the next chapter, I explore how this feminist geopolitical framework translates into a methodological approach and the design of specific research methods. From there, I will delve into the heart of this dissertation with three chapters exploring various aspects of the protectorship triad. Chapter 4 focuses on the role of the aggressor and how it was produced by the state to simultaneously justify militarization and the disciplining of the northern population. Chapter 5 moves to post-war peacebuilding programs to examine how different geographies of differences are invoked by differently scaled actors attempting to claim, negotiate, and contest the role of protector. Finally, Chapter 6 queries the assumed passivity of those in the role of victim by examining the agency of a group of rural human rights.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methods and Methodology**

While the previous chapter provided theoretical justification for a place-based study of geopolitical processes, this chapter demonstrates the implications of such an approach on the design of feminist research attentive to uneven power relations and the politics of ‘speaking for’ others. As there is no singular or definitive approach to feminist research, I open this chapter by exploring debates amongst feminist scholars regarding methodological issues to clarify and justify my specific approach to research. After a discussion of these methodological concerns, I will turn to the specific qualitative methods I employed during the course of this research.

#### **Feminist Methodologies**

Reinharz and Davidman (1992) contend that a feminist approach to research represents “a perspective, not a method.” How to define this ‘perspective,’ however, has been a topic of productive debates amongst feminist scholars. As I shall expand upon below, three specific aspects of these debates inform my methodological approach. First, while I seek to understand how gender regimes function within systems of violence, I am not focused exclusively on women or women’s issues. Second, while I do prioritize lived experience, I am attentive to feminist critiques of research that poses subjective experience as the antidote to masculinist objectivity. Third, while I am attentive to the violence of representation and the danger of ‘speaking for’ others, I strive to craft a

research process that acknowledges such dangers without becoming paralyzed by them. Throughout, I draw upon place-based understandings of social relations that do not isolate or reify the local but, rather, highlight the ways places are interconnected. In the next three portions of this section, I more fully explain each of these tensions and how they shape my work.

### **The Study of Women and Women's Issues**

In her influential work of feminism and methodology, Harding (1987) proposed two primary characteristics of feminist research: 1) designing research that addresses issues of importance and/or interest to women and 2) addressing the positionality of the researcher and the inherent power relationship between the researcher and researched. While the second point has received much support (eg. Reinharz and Davidman 1992; England 1994; Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002), the first point, the degree to which feminist research should focus on women, has led to debates indicative of the multiple priorities and agendas represented by feminist scholars (for example, see the collected volume by Biber, Gilmartin, and Lydenberg 1999). Hennessy (1993), for instance, argues that feminists must be careful not to essentialize the category of women in their research. Instead, she offered the following methodological approach:

In situating the historical construction of the feminine subject in a systemic analysis, it offers feminists a way to explain more fully 'our' mediated and uneven historical positions. In so doing, feminism's subject is transformed from an empirical group, 'women,' to the collective subject of a critical discourse which pushes on the boundaries of western individualism. (p.9)

I draw upon this insight to inform my analysis of women's rights. For example, in my work with MOK, a self-identified women's group, I am attentive to the heterogeneous nature of identity and power within the group. However, I am also attentive to the ways their experiences translate into a collective whole through the discourse of rights. My methodological approach, therefore, engages with the tension between individuality and collectivity in relation to both top-down development processes and bottom-up strategies for empowerment.

### **Experience versus Objectivity**

In a different but related concern about the focus on women and women's issues within feminist research, Grant (1993) argues that feminist scholars should not prioritize subjective experience as a means of critiquing the masculinist objectivity of science. She argues that using 'experience' as the foundation for feminist interventions has the potential to enable the use of female stereotypes and foster essentialist theories that idealize women and feminine characteristics. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) expound on this line of reasoning, arguing that experience is a problematic filter which is always articulated through the researcher's language, theory and ontology. In a related argument, Gilbert (2005) claims that an uncritical support of subjectivity may expose respondents to exploitation due to the exposure of personal information; therefore, "some level of objectification is ultimately present in the research process...and may not be undesirable" (p.93). She redefines objectivity following Haraway's (1988) argument that all



knowledges are situated and must be understood as partial and contingent. Similarly,

McDowell (1997) contends that

the adoption of qualitative methods and case-study analysis, the acceptance of subjectivity in research relations rather than a doomed search for objectivity, still does not free us from exploitative social relations between researcher and researched...and even from the dangers of betraying our subjects. (p.391)

Such interventions move beyond reactionary responses to masculinist processes and instead consider how feminist work itself is implicated in multiple and contradictory power relations.

Due to these considerations, I am careful within my own work to draw upon lived experience to challenge dominant narratives not because it is somehow above or separate from these narratives, but, rather, because it offers alternative perspectives on the same processes in which narratives of security and development are embedded. The existence of multiple perspectives makes evident the situated knowledges upon which dominant narratives are based. My place-based approach to studying geopolitical processes allows me to put lived experience in conversation with variously scaled discourses to demonstrate the partial and contingent nature of discourses that appear global or universal.

### **Representation and Imperialism**

In her book, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Smith (1999) offers a comprehensive examination of western imperialist research in which she discredits the empirical analysis of 'third world' or indigenous spaces within the White western academy. Similarly,

Patai's (1994) work ensures feminist researchers are not exempt from this critique when she argues that "the [feminist] researcher's desire to act out feminist commitments, relinquish control, and involve the researched in all states of the project run the risk...of subtly translating into the researcher's own demand for affirmation and validation" (p.23). From their positions as Western feminist researchers, Nordstrom and Robben (1995) engage with these representational concerns by contending that "when we purport to speak for others, we carry the western enterprises into the mouths of other people. No matter our dedication, we cannot escape the legacy of our culture" (p.11).

While bringing much needed attention to processes of exploitation and oppression, these critiques have had two detrimental implications. The first is a fear of (mis)representation that has paralyzed some researchers, causing them to question their ability to say anything about 'other' communities (see, for example, England 1994). This paralysis, however, has also been read as an abdication of responsibility. In her influential article "Can the Subaltern Speak?," Spivak (1988) argues that withdrawing from research with subaltern communities is too easy a response to the conundrum of representational power relations. Instead, she insists upon constant engagement with the histories and geographies connecting researcher and research participants. Similarly, Radcliffe (1994) contends that "disclaiming the right to speak about/with Third World women acts ... to justify an abdication of responsibility with regard to global relations of privilege and authority which are granted, whether we like it or not, to First World women (and men)" (p.28). In the face of uneven power relations, these scholars make evident the necessity of acknowledging our positionality and finding ways to use said position towards emancipatory ends.

The second implication of avoiding research with subaltern groups so as to prevent exploitative research relations is the reification of communities as bounded entities. To say that there are distinct sets of ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ and that Western researchers as ‘outsiders’ to subaltern communities cannot represent them is, as Jones (2000) argues, simplistic and misleading. The very postcolonial scholars that say Western researchers should not work within subaltern communities would not accept a similar analysis of reified community boundaries and essentialized identities in other contexts (Briggs and Sharp 2004). The challenge, therefore, is to develop a conceptualization of ‘the field’ that is attentive to both the flexibility of identity and the effects of unequal power relations.

To navigate this challenge, I return to feminist geographic theories of place and identity to reconceptualize ‘the field’ and feminist research within it. Weaving together critical work on scales (eg. Herod and Wright 2002) with theories of place such as Massey’s (1994b) concept of extroverted places, Katz (2001) displaces theorizations of study sites as bounded locales. Rather, she poses research sites as relational. Tracing how sites connect scales from the local to the global and to other places demonstrates complex webs of connections and interdependencies, messier than any hierarchical or vertical schematic. Sharp and Dowler (2011) contend that “this emphasis on connection rather than separation also allows feminist researchers to address postcolonial challenges to the problem of representation” (p.152). While they agree that misrepresentation and imperialist power relations are always a possibility, they also believe there is a possibility of “opening a true dialogue with those so often marginalized and silenced by dominant discourses and representations” (p.152) (see, for example, Lorraine Dowler and Sharp

2001; Jennifer Hyndman 2001; Sundberg 2003). Finally, they caution against the assumption that a researcher from ‘the West’ will always be in a position of power. Power relations that the researcher cannot alter can emerge that cause her to feel less control over the direction of the research. Rather than assuming a determinative posture about power relations in any given situation, researchers should remain attentive to the way they influence the research process and its representation.

In summary, my methodological approach to this project prioritizes situated knowledge and is attentive to power relations in and through the research process. It is based upon feminist methodological traditions that questions taken-for-granted categories in order to establish new ways of understanding while simultaneously attempting to engage in social and political change through research (Hanson 1997; Oberhauser 1997; Valentine 1997; Ekinsmyth 2002). Furthermore, I am particularly attentive to McDowell’s (1997) concern regarding the potential for exploitation and betrayal between researcher and subjects due, in part, to my positionality as a white Western academic doing research in rural Africa and the legacy of historical relations in this context. For this reason, I heed Katz’s (1994) call for constant and continual evaluation of one’s position in the field. This demands an iterative process of reflecting on one’s position in the field and incorporating that reflection into written analysis of the work.

### **Primary Methods and Data Used**

As mentioned above, feminist methodologies are indicative of particular perspectives on research rather than the assignment of specific methods. In this section, I

describe the methods I employed to achieve a feminist geopolitical approach for this study. By focusing on semi-structured interview, ethnographic observations and secondary document analysis, I utilized a combination of the three main types of qualitative methods: oral, textual, and observational (Hay 2010). These qualitative methods were chosen because they have been identified as particularly useful when, as in this study, researchers seek to study the interplay between “structures and processes on the one hand and...individuals and their experiences on the other” (Hay 2010, 5). In addition, I chose these methods specifically because of my concern regarding the established reputation of researchers in northern Uganda. During the war, many external researchers came in, asked questions, and then left without sharing the results of their work. This caused distrust among the general population. My choice of ethnographic techniques was meant, among other things, to provide the time necessary for me to build relationships with those participating in the study. I also integrated multiple opportunities for feedback into my data collection process. These included individual and group conversations to discuss preliminary findings.

Before discussing the specific locations and phases of my research, I offer a brief review of each of the methods I employed beginning with ethnographic observations. While my work draws upon this new trajectory in ethnographic research, I am hesitant to employ the term ‘ethnography’ due to its historical connotations. Instead, I claim to employ ethnographic techniques of data collection as part of a qualitative research methodology. Ethnography was originally designed in anthropology as a research method to build a ‘local theory’ that would facilitate the understanding of social processes in the research area as well as other local communities. According to Wolcott (1999),

ethnography “finds its orienting and overarching purpose in an underlying concern with cultural interpretation” (p.68). While social and cultural context are clearly integral to this research project, the motivating research goal is not the description, analysis or interpretation of a culture or cultural group (Creswell 1998). Such an approach has historically supported place-bound narratives of people and places, something I explicitly challenge in this dissertation. In recent years, however, what is considered ethnographic has become more inclusive with some scholars attempting to realize ethnographies of global processes that draw upon local experiences but are not confined to them (eg. Katz 2004; Li 2007; Tsing 2011).

I collected the data from my ethnographic observations, including participant observation while working within human rights organizations, in the form of field notes. I recorded observations before and during the periods I conducted interviews to offer a less directed and more expansive representation of social context than is available from directed interviews. According to Schensul et al. (1999), ethnographic observation is a process through which the researcher can build relationships within the communities where the research is being conducted, provides the research with intuitive as well as factual knowledge of the population and processes being studied, allows insight into social patterns about which discussion is difficult or forbidden, and provides the researcher with topics that can be discussed in a more direct manner during interviews. Because of the research fatigue in the region that made most people weary of surveys and hesitant to commit to interviews, ethnographic observation provided me with a means of gathering data in situations where people were not focused on my presence or explicitly

shaping information for my benefit. It also allowed me to build relationships that overcame that initial distrust.

The second distinct form of qualitative methods used in this research was in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Interviews supplemented my ethnographic data by allowing individuals to voice their perspectives and experiences of the post-war transition in northern Uganda. The interview process provided me access to more members of the professional class of NGO workers and government employees than ethnographic observation alone would have allowed. By scheduling discreet blocks of time for interviews with members of this population and having a clear list of questions, I was able to fit my research into the norms of their professionalized workplaces. Amongst the MOK members, to be discussed more below, my interviews became less formal in order to facilitate a more conversational environment. Interviews were an invaluable part of this research project as they highlight individual agency by allowing people to articulate their engagements with and interpretations of processes occurring at multiple scales (Hay 2010). In this way, interviews can contribute to a place-based analysis that makes the connections between local experiences and differently scaled processes such as national and international norms.

The final method used in this study was the analysis of secondary documents from historical as well as contemporary sources, including newspaper articles, research and policy documents written by government and research institutions, and academic work pertinent to the research project. While these documents do not provide the primary source of information for investigating how total interventions in people's everyday lives, they do make visible the narratives used to justify these interventions and the policies and

practices used to implement them. By combining the data from ethnographic observation, interviews, and secondary document analysis, I am able to realize a place-based analysis that examines how variously scaled processes come together to shape the unique social processes of the post-war landscape in northern Uganda.

### **Site Selection**

The map below (figure 3.1) situates my research sites within Uganda. The districts<sup>3</sup> highlighted in yellow represent the areas affected by the LRA-war. The darker yellow districts of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader are the areas that were the most affected by the war and home primarily to people of the Acholi ethnic group. The war directly affected the lighter yellow districts to the south only during times of heightened conflict. As will be discussed below, I conducted my research predominately in Gulu, the administrative hub of the region, and in the village of Odek, the home of the MOK human rights association. As will become relevant in Chapter 4, Odek is also the birthplace of Joseph Kony, leader of the LRA. I strategically selected these two regions. Gulu represented the center of the development industry in northern Uganda while Odek was marginalized during the war due to its connection with Joseph Kony. Examining the (dis)connections between these two sites allowed insights into the politics of peacebuilding and development in the region.

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<sup>3</sup> Given the constant redistricting of regions, I use the 1995 district boundaries established with the current constitution because they mirror how participants also described their geography. People commonly refer to the 'old district of Gulu' to refer to events occurring in that region.





Figure 3-1: Map of Research Area (map design: Paulo Raposo)

### Phase I: NGO's in Gulu

The first phase of my research focused on participant observation with two organizations in Gulu Town that were established as a response to the war and are currently striving to maintain their relevance in the post-war landscape. Both organizations focused on human rights and peacebuilding and had professionalized during the war so that they now had offices, paid staff and contracts with international NGOs. I selected these two NGOs because I was particularly interested in their processes

of transition into the post-war period because of the frequency with which informants referenced these organizations as key players in the fight against violence during the war. In the first five months of my fieldwork I worked with these groups during which time I traded my time and expertise for access to their archival documents, meetings, and informal conversations during tea and lunch breaks. I contributed to activities as mundane as editing and filing documents to more substantive assignments such as writing reports and grants. In return, the organizations invited me to participate in planning meetings and to go with them when they went into ‘the field’ to work with communities. These experiences shaped my understanding and appreciation for how they negotiated donor requirements, community accountability, and their own mission and logistical needs, and informed my critique of the hegemonic processes at play in the region. Further, these experiences revealed the alternative narratives to ‘the war story’ discussed in Chapter 4.

During this time, I conducted open-ended in-depth interviews with 20 individuals working at other community organizations, NGOs, and international agencies in Gulu Town. Due to significant turnover and reassignment within the workforce, these 20 people had collective experience at approximately 35 different organizations and spoke about current and previous employment experiences during their interviews. In addition, I interviewed five government and military personnel to understand how they understood their roles in creating their visions of the post-war landscape. Most of these 25 interviewees were contacted through snowball sampling (R. Atkinson and Flint 2001) and personal connections although I contacted a few without introduction due to my interest in the specific activities of their organization or agency. While the specific questions

varied due to the nature of the individual's work and experience, the following questions represent key themes throughout the interviews:

- Has the mission of your organization changed or been adjusted during the past five years? How?
- How are projects chosen and designed? Where does the funding come from?
- How does your work contribute to post-war stability and peacebuilding?
- What do you think the greatest challenges/priorities are right now in northern Uganda?

These interviews served to contextualize the information I was concurrently gathering from participant-observation within the two NGOs and helped establish if the experiences in those organizations were unique or indicative of more general trends. I therefore conducted these interviews until the information regarding interventions in the post-war landscape reached saturation (ie. new interviews did not yield new information).

## **Phase II: Research with MOK**

When I was introduced to MOK, I began to hear stories different from those I had gathered in Gulu Town. Hence, I decided to concentrate my efforts on MOK during the second phase of my research. To realize this research, I had to overcome some logistical barriers. To begin with, MOK was located 70 km from Gulu Town. I therefore had to find alternative housing. I originally thought it would be useful to move between homes of various MOK members, but it soon became apparent that this would be an

inconvenience to many. MOK's treasurer, who lived adjacent to the MOK office, invited me to stay at her residence. Her home proved to be a strategic location as I was able to observe and participate in many informal MOK gatherings. Concerned that I was putting undue burden on the treasurer, I initially wanted to pay for my room and board. However, my Acholi friends vetoed this idea immediately, explaining that it would be an affront to her dignity. Hospitality is an important part of Acholi identity. Thus, instead, I would bring the treasurer sugar or dried fish from town every time I visited and helped in group efforts to harvest her sesame and sorghum crops, her ability to farm made more difficult due to my presence and her growing health concerns. In order to contribute to the group more generally, I also contributed by writing an organizational history and grant applications for the group per their requests.

Language proved a second logistical problem. In Gulu Town, I conducted my interviews in English. Very few members of MOK spoke English, and those that did were not always comfortable using English to express complex ideas. I therefore employed a research assistant to assist with translation. Although it was challenging to find someone to fulfill this role, I eventually connected with an individual who became invested in the project and not only helped with translation but assisted me in crafting appropriate questions and analyzing the results. The man who became my research assistant had worked as a translator and research assistant on multiple research projects in the past. His most important qualification, however, was his ability to make MOK members feel at ease and gain their trust, a key aspect of successful ethnographic work. My initial concerns about bringing a young man to work with me in this group of predominantly older women were put at ease as soon he was treated as a son and received much

unsolicited life advice from his new mothers. Through his willingness to engage with all aspects of their lives, my research assistant greatly facilitated my integration into the lives of MOK members. With my limited Luo language skills, I could engage in pleasantries and small talk, but I could not follow long stories or ask complicated questions. I was therefore dependent upon my research assistant to translate the more intricate and sensitive thoughts people shared with me; he was also helpful in notifying me if there was a conversation happening that he thought would contribute to my work.

My data collection while with MOK combined participant observation and interviews. The style of participant observation I employed in this setting may be characterized by what Kearns (2000) defined as *observer-as-participant*. On the whole, I was more observer than participant. When mediations, meeting or educational programs occurred, I would tend to just observe. One notable exception was dance. I had gained acceptance within the group through my willingness (and questionable ability) to do the Larakaraka dance that they used to draw attention to educational activities. My dancing in particular drew increased crowds, thus I was invited to participate in the dance when it was done in public settings for this purpose. However, once the dancing was over, I would fade into the background while MOK presented their play on child abuse, domestic violence, or the importance of education. On days without a major event, my research assistant and I would travel to the homesteads of individual MOK members to discuss their life histories, their experiences in MOK and any other topic that they wished to discuss. I conducted 45 home-based interviews and asked questions of another 20-30 members during MOK events and gatherings.

Unlike in Gulu Town where it was acceptable for me to record interviews or make notes during conversations, I quickly learned that these practices put people on edge in the village. I therefore followed Dowler's (2001) approach of writing down stories and observations at the end of the day. To confirm that I had documented the main ideas and events properly, my research assistant read my notes the next morning and filled in any missing data or comment on how his interpretation varied from mine thus providing invaluable feedback that confirmed the validity of my field notes.

I had originally thought it would be best to build trust with MOK members by staying in Odek for extended periods of time, however, this proved imprudent. One reason was my research assistant's availability. Another reason was my desire to backup my field notes on my computer. Finally, I did not want to take advantage of the hospitality of MOK members, or place more strain on their daily lives. These concerns would be a contributing factor to the design of my ethnographic field work. Because I moved back and forth between Odek and Gulu Town every week, I continued my relationships with the organizations and individuals I had worked with in town. I would occasionally seek out an informant to ask a follow-up question based on my experiences in Odek. I would also bring questions about happenings in town to MOK to hear their interpretations and get their feedback.

In addition to these oral and observational methods of data collection, I collected textual and audiovisual sources of data. While working with the organizations in Gulu Town, I obtained access to reports and records they had from their advocacy during the war as well as more recent papers. These documents allowed me to explore how the organizations viewed the war to post-war transition and their role in it. MOK also gave

me access to their case files which my research assistant translated for me. I was provided unsolicited documents through the course of many varied interactions. Sometimes interviewees would indicate a report or study that thought would address the questions I was asking. Sometimes a stranger would unexpectedly provide me with a source of data after hearing a one sentence description of my research. Crucially, this is how I obtained the Ugandan Army's documentary on the war in northern Uganda.

### **Phase III: Preliminary Results and Verification**

In the last phase of my research, I prioritized group and individual conversations in which my preliminary findings were discussed and critiqued. These conversations occurred at the end of my extended fieldwork as well as during my return visit six months later. In most of these conversations, I presented my ideas as possibilities rather than concise arguments in order to leave space for alternative interpretations. For example, I asked MOK members to think about the mediations they had done where a woman was counseled to go back to her abusive husband. I asked if this was a way of eventually helping her get out of the situation by proving to everyone she had done everything she could to rectify the situation. They agreed this happened at times, but that the land tenure system complicated things. Such complications inform my analysis of MOK's work in Chapter 6.

### **Limitations of Research Design and Implementation**

By its very nature, ethnographic research is limited by its generalizability (Hay 2010). It prioritizes depth over breadth of information, thereby limiting the types of questions that can be asked and claims that can be made. For example, my ethnographic data did not allow me to statistically answer questions about lived experience throughout northern Uganda. Instead, I was restricted to thick description based on my experiences working with a relatively small group of individuals. For the purposes of this study, this limitation was not detrimental as it provided sufficient situated knowledge to challenge the universal claims of the narrative of local violence and rhetoric of total interventions. However, if one were to study the variations in experiences of (in)security across northern Uganda, then a different methodological approach would be needed.

Another limitation of ethnographic research is the difficulty of replicating results as the researcher is the primary tool of measurement and the results are thereby highly dependent upon the individual researcher's experiences and understandings of a situation. For example, how various respondents perceived me and my research greatly affected my access to information. My reception was based upon readings of myself in which I was variously seen as a woman, an American, a student, an individual who tried to speak Luo but was not fluent, and someone who had connections to various organizations and individuals. What a male NGO professional or a female member of MOK cared to share with me will probably be different from what they would share with a differently positioned individual. In addition, my own experiences and priorities shaped the themes that I investigated and the evidence I collected. While such individualization of research



is unavoidable, I sought to counteract the potential limitations of this approach by verifying my interpretations of events with respondents as well as discussing my preliminary findings with key informants.

Nevertheless, my ethnographic experiences directly informed my subsequent analyses. For example, had I not been doing research in Joseph Kony's hometown of Odek, I doubt that my analysis narrative of local violence would have included a focus on prejudice within the Acholi ethnic group against individuals tied to Kony through kinship (see Chapter 4). Had I been working exclusively with a population of children abducted and abused by the LRA, my views on peacebuilding may have been significantly different. The location of my investigations, therefore, greatly shaped how I addressed my research questions. Still, my process of site selection was not based upon a systematic method to create the most comprehensive set of data. While I did purposefully begin my work in Gulu town as the hub of administrative activity in the region, my eventual work with MOK was based on personal connections and logistical feasibility. While I believe these connections were important in generating relations of trust necessary to perform the research, future research could augment the analyses of this dissertation by examining the priorities and practices of additional individuals and community based organizations.

Finally, the temporal aspects of this project limited the scope of my research in two ways. First, while narratives and experiences of the war were central to my analysis of the post-war, I was only able to access war time experiences through people's memories. While useful in terms of illustrating the memories of war that are maintained into the post-war, this approach offers a very limited understanding of wartime practices of responsibility and feelings of (in)security. Future feminist geopolitical research into

post-war landscapes could benefit from a longitudinal study that includes data from multiple periods in the conflict-peacebuilding-development continuum. Secondly, the specific year in which this research was conducted provided a unique combination of opportunities and limitations. As an election year, many people talked about local, regional and international politics. However, I quickly learned that many of the gatekeepers I had initially thought to depend upon for introduction into various communities were, in fact, politically active in electoral campaigns. I was uncomfortable with the how I was being presented as an indication of these individuals' international ties; I subsequently decided not to rely upon their help. For this reason, I lost many of the connections I had thought would form the foundation of my research. I chose to constrain my research in this way, and future research might engage more directly with the relationship between total interventions and electoral politics.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the feminist qualitative methodology used in this study was informed by postcolonial and 'third-world' feminist critiques of academic research. Informed by my concerns for social justice and research, I subscribed to the feminist goal to establish collaborative and nonexploitative relationships while conducting research (Creswell 1998). Was I successful at realizing this goal through my methodological choices and conduct in the research process? While I have provided some basis for answering this question in this chapter, I withhold final judgment as the research process

continues to unfold through the writing process, the ways my analysis may change over time, and the mediums through which I will continue to communicate my analyses.

## Chapter 4

### Narratives of War in Northern Uganda:

#### Militarization, (in)security, and violent masculinities

The normative model [of masculinity] is thus shown to have considerable destructive power that can be manipulated by the state for purposes of social control and creating more space for political and military manoeuvre – and the nexus of ‘masculinity,’ power, violence and conflict begins to come into focus. Within this nexus it is impossible to dissociate power relations between individual men from the power relationships existing between individual men and the state.

(Dolan 2002, 79)

Writing in the midst of the war between the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and the Government of Uganda, Dolan (2002) argues that there is a disconnect between expectations of masculinity and civilian men’s abilities to fulfill those expectations in northern Uganda. He contends that a hegemonic form of masculinity, a state-sponsored militaristic form of masculinity, produces conditions in which alternative expressions of masculinity are limited to the point that violence is one of the few means by which to perform masculinity. Not only does this reinforce processes of war, it also establishes a hierarchy of masculinities beneficial to the state in which soldiers are trained and encouraged to practice violence whereas civilians are criticized and disciplined for their performances of violent masculinity. In this chapter, I extend Dolan’s project of examining the political utility of controlling the narratives and practices of masculinity. While Dolan focused explicitly on individual men’s lived experiences of masculinity during the war, I examine how narratives of masculinity create geographies of insecurity

at multiple scales. This chapter investigates how state-based definitions of protection and security contribute to lived experiences of violence and insecurity in northern Uganda through the combined processes of militarism, racialization, and relational masculinities (the definitions of which will be discussed below). Drawing upon recent work in feminist and critical geopolitics that challenges state-centric definitions of security (S. Dalby 1994; J. Hyndman 2004), this chapter disputes the idea that militaristic security practices translate into increased security for a war-affected population, especially when that population is understood by the state as the source of conflict. It contests the paternalistic logic of protection that gives those in the role of ‘protector’ (such as the state) the power to define security for others (Young 2003). By demonstrating how these protectionist narratives of security actually lead to an increase in the experiences of insecurity by those supposedly being protected, this chapter contributes to feminist geopolitical studies in which security is no longer an assumed category but becomes “a decidedly spatialised and significantly contentious issue” (Fluri 2011b, 281; see also de Alwis and Hyndman 2002; Kleinfeld 2007).

The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section establishes the discursive frame used by the government to explain the violence of the war. Through my analysis, I argue that the government promoted a narrative of violence which separated the population of northern Uganda from the rest of the nation-state while simultaneously providing a justification for the government’s militaristic interventions in the region. To undermine the militarism and racialization of violence linked to this narrative, the subsequent sections expose geographies of insecurity produced through the discursive and material practices associated with this narrative. The second section provides four

examples of how the racialized narrative of violence translated into increased experiences of violence and insecurity for the northern population thus exposing the hypocrisy of the government's claim to be protecting the civilian population. The final section turns to experiences and performances of masculinity to further challenge the government's narrative of the war. Whereas the government casts the male population of northern Uganda into the role of aggressive masculine other to explain the violence in the region, I draw upon relational theories of masculinity to argue that the violence perpetuated by civilians during the war was a result of the conditions of the war. The state-based promotion of a hegemonic militaristic masculinity reduced the opportunities for performing non-militaristic masculinities. Increased violence amongst the civilian population, therefore, was a result of the war not a cause of it.

Before moving forward with the analysis of this chapter, I return to definitions offered in Chapter 2 regarding two sets of terms that are central to my argument: 1) race/racialization/ethnicity and 2) militarization/militarism. In this chapter, I examine the racialization of the Acholi ethnic group as perpetuated by the post-colonial state of Uganda. This racialization draws on colonial-era narratives of race but also relies heavily on ethnic and cultural markers of difference to separate the population of northern Uganda from the rest of the country. Historically, the difference between race and ethnicity was understood to be one of biological versus cultural difference. However, it is now generally accepted in the social sciences that categories of race do not exist as biological facts, but, rather as social processes. These processes, known as racialization, are "the representational process[es] whereby social significance is attached to certain biological and/or cultural characteristics" (Walter 1999, 226). Processes of racialization

are multiple and varied as they reflect historically and geographically specific power relations between different groups. With this understanding of race as a social process of racialization, race as well as ethnicity are conceived as social markers of difference used to reinforce particular power relations. I stress the correlation between these two concepts because it is difficult to disentangle the racialization of 'the Acholi' from their construction as an ethnic other within the nation-state. Because the processes of othering associated with the discourses of both race and ethnicity are remarkably similar – with both highlighting the innate qualities and behaviors of a particular group of people connected by kinship – I have chosen to use the term racialization to highlight the *process* of creating difference along lines of both racial and ethnic difference. One final point regarding my use of racialization as an analytic tool is the acknowledgement that where gender is not explicitly considered, masculine racial identities are privileged (Walter 1999). Thus, the designation of the Acholi as a 'martial race' or 'genetically violent' is predominately in reference to Acholi performances of masculinity.

The second set of terms which inform this chapter's analysis and thus are important to clarify are militarization and militarism. By militarization I am not referring simply to the growth of armies. Rather, I draw upon Enloe's (2000) definition of militarization as, "the step-by-step process by which something becomes *controlled by, dependent on, or derives its value from* the military as an institution or militaristic criteria" (p. 281, emphasis in original). Studies of militarization therefore take us beyond the actions of militaries and into complex social relations produced through and in relation to militaristic institutions and ideas. As a complimentary but slightly different concept, militarism is a militarized system which a society adopts to sustain peace and/or

prepare for war (Elshtain and Tobias 1990). Militarism is predicated on a militaristic mindset which views the world as dangerous and full of threats with military action as the only reasonable means of addressing said threats (Enloe 2007). In this chapter, I argue not only that the militaristic mindset is characteristic of the security-state created during Museveni's presidency but that it has been facilitated and perpetuated by a specific geographic narrative of northern Uganda as a source of violence. This narrative, in which a violent northern masculinity threatens the stability of the modern nation-state, has two interconnected results. First, it justifies the militarization of the state which has facilitated military interventions both domestically and internationally. Second, this narrative of violence creates lived experiences of insecurity that are obscured by state-based claims of providing security through militarism.

In the next section, I draw upon the analytic utility of racialization, militarization, and militarism to examine how sources of insecurity are identified via narratives of violence in northern Uganda. In my analysis of the narratives promoted by the government of Uganda and national media sources, I elucidate a racialized depiction of an aggressive masculine other which dominates these narratives. As a point of comparison, I offer alternative narratives of the violence of the war from individuals living in northern Uganda. In later portions of this chapter, I make connections between these narratives of war and lived experiences of violence by illuminating the geographies of insecurity produced by these national narratives and the militarism associated with them.



## **Narratives of War in Northern Uganda**

In the national discourses surrounding the war in northern Uganda, there is often a slippage, a lack of distinction, between Joseph Kony, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), and the population of northern Uganda, particularly members of the Acholi ethnic group. Simply put, Joseph Kony is seen as a representative member of the Acholi ethnic group and the LRA is simultaneously seen as an extension of Kony's self and as a product of the Acholi warrior culture. Elsewhere, I trouble the discursive construction of Joseph Kony as a monster (Laliberte forthcoming), but for the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on the spatialized narratives of difference which invoke the existence of a violent Acholi masculinity to explain the region's violent past and present.

### **National Narratives**

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the legacy of colonial narratives of difference between 'the north' and 'the south' continues to play a role in Ugandan politics. Historically, the southern ethnic groups were deemed more 'civilized' by the British and given administrative control of the protectorate while the northern groups were dubbed a primitive 'martial race' used as labor reserves for southern economic projects as well as recruits for the police and army (Atkinson 1994; Dolan 2002). This division of labor led to the creation of a military ethnocracy (Doom and Vlassenroot 1999) that was popularly understood as the manifestation of the Acholi's innate warrior identity. This was reinforced by racist narratives that produced northerners as 'less than

human' as evidenced by individuals in Kampala who, when interviewed, spoke of being raised to think of northerners as 'primitive', 'backward,' 'poor,' 'illiterate,' and 'swine' (ACORD 2000).

In the mid-1980's, Yoweri Museveni took advantage of this historic narrative to build solidarity amongst the groups in southern Uganda against Milton Obote, the seated president who hailed from northern Uganda (Branch 2011). As he was gathering support for his rebellion, Museveni actively reinforced the image of the northerners, particularly the Acholi, as primitive and warlike and thus having no place in national politics. This rhetoric was translated into practice when Museveni took power; members of the Acholi ethnic group were excluded from national political offices and independent local leadership was suppressed (Branch 2011).

While the LRA rebellion, like its predecessors, was originally interpreted by the national media as a continuation of this north/south rivalry, the narrative quickly shifted when the LRA began targeting members of the Acholi ethnic group (Finnström 2008). The north/south narrative of the war was supplanted by the story of a north/north conflict. In this new narrative, the war was isolated to northern Uganda. It was Acholi versus Acholi. This narrative was legible to a national audience because of the repeated narrative of difference that constructed the Acholi as a martial race. It was not unreasonable, following this line of thought, to imagine a war amongst members of the Acholi ethnic group. This racialization of the sources of violence in the region was made explicit in the comment by Major General James Kazini, one of the President's closest military associates, cited in the introduction. In response to a Human Rights Watch question regarding reported human rights violations by government soldiers in northern Uganda,

Kazini said, “If anything, it is local Acholi soldiers causing the problems. It’s the cultural background of the people here: they are very violent. It’s genetic” (Human Rights Watch 1997, 59).

A similar statement reinforcing the ethnic origins of the LRA’s violence was made by Kajabago ka-Rusoke, lecturer at the National Leadership Institute, Kyankwanzi, a Ugandan government training center for national leaders in public service, military, and government security. In an opinion piece printed in *New Vision*, the national government sponsored newspaper, he writes, “Even the political advisors who belong to the Lord’s Resistance Army...*because of ethnic sympathy* and prestige, have decided to sacrifice their conscience so that they support *their own* military monster Kony” (ka-Rusoke 2009, emphasis added). The colonial assertion that the Acholi were “primordially violent” (Finnström 2010) was strategically reappropriated by Museveni’s regime to create a war narrative in which northern Uganda, through its connection with the Acholi people, was the source of violence in an otherwise peaceful country.

Throughout the government’s war story, the protector/victim/aggressor triad provides a narrative structure. In its discourse of protecting the vulnerable population of northern Uganda from aggressive masculine others, the government claims the active, masculinized position of protector. The voices and opinions of individuals in northern Uganda are marginalized as either part of the feminized population that is supposed to passively accept protection or as an embodiment of the aggressive masculine other that has no legitimate claim on the state. By showing how the protector/victim/aggressor triad in northern Uganda is based upon place-based gendered and racialized understandings of difference, my analysis provides new empirical evidence to feminist theories of war

which claim the policing of masculinity via its connections with race and sexuality is used to control and bound national spaces (Theweleit 1987; McClintock 1995; Puar and Rai 2002; Banerjee 2005). In Uganda, the gendered and racialized narrative of northern violence is used to discipline the northern population and delegitimize their claims on the state. However, this narrative was not the only discursive interpretations of the violence in the region. For alternative narratives, I turn to the stories of individuals living in northern Uganda.

### **Northern Narratives**

The national narrative that portrayed Joseph Kony and the LRA as the only threats to security in the region did not mesh with people's lived experiences of the war. None of the people I spoke to in northern Uganda thought the LRA had committed all of the atrocities attributed to them by the Ugandan government. In fact, most people focused their stories of the war on crimes committed by the government army, the Ugandan People's Defense Forces (UPDF).

The following four accusations exemplify the types of violences that were attributed to the UPDF in northern Uganda. I heard these accusations from multiple sources during my research, they contributed to an alternative narrative of the war created and shared amongst members of the northern population. First, the UPDF were assumed to have dressed up like LRA and committed some of the massacres subsequently attributed to Kony by the government. Second, as an explanation of the abnormally high HIV rates in particular IDP camps, the UPDF allegedly deployed battalions of HIV

positive soldiers outside of these IDP camps. The soldiers then spread the disease through rape and the practice of exchanging protection for sex. Third, the UPDF was said to have been within feet of Kony without arresting or killing him. As one man said, “I could see Kony, he was right there [pointing to a tree 10 feet in front of him] and there was the UPDF [pointing to a bush 5 feet behind him], and they did nothing.” Finally, because the government had cut amnesty programs short and had increased military action in the midst of peace negotiations, many people believed the government was purposefully undermining peace processes. Collectively, these stories perpetuated the notion that the government was in fact instigating the war rather than trying to end it.

I am not debating the veracity of each of these claims against the government just as I am not debating Kony’s guilt or innocence. Rather, I draw attention to the construction of an alternative topography of insecurity. While the Government of Uganda has identified the LRA, and specifically Joseph Kony, as the source of all insecurity in the region, the lived experiences of people in northern Uganda say otherwise. Their stories of government and army abuse are attempts to redefine the narrative, to make connections between the multiple sources of violence that they navigated during the war as well as those they continue to navigate in the post-war period. A feminist geopolitical analysis which focuses on lived experiences purposefully brings such stories into geopolitical debates to challenge state-based narratives.

The remainder of this chapter follows the narrative of northern/Acholi violence into the everyday lives of people living in northern Uganda. I demonstrate how the racialization and gendering of this narrative have material effects on people’s lives by examining the geographies of insecurity that are created as people negotiate the combined

processes of militarization, militarism, and othering that characterize the landscapes of war and violence in the region. I begin by examining geographies of insecurity produced by the racialized narratives of violence in northern Uganda.

### **Geographies of (In)security**

In this section, I explore how the discursive links between Joseph Kony, the LRA, and the Acholi population has material effects on people's lives. I begin by examining the 'protected villages' created by the government in the mid-1990s to show how the rhetoric of protection was but a thin veil for a racist assumption that the entire Acholi population was collaborating with the LRA and thus a threat to the nation-state. Moving from official state policy to informal processes of harassment, I then examine how the term 'Kony' was turned into a racialized epithet used to constrain the mobility, political activity, and peacebuilding activities of members of the Acholi ethnic group.

### **Forced Displacement**

A quintessential example of the government's instrumentalization of the narrative of racialized difference was the forced displacement of the northern civilian population into 'protected villages' starting in the mid-1990s. Within the rhetoric of protection, I argue that this forced displacement simultaneously constructed the population as both feminized and masculinized others. Let me begin with the feminization of the population. The Government of Uganda claimed the creation of 'protected villages' was in the best

interests of the war-affected population. The international community provided humanitarian aid to a population that was produced as dependent based on the conditions of the displacement. Both national and international actors framed their interventions in the rhetoric of benevolence and protection even as there was a dismissal of dissenting views or alternative security concerns voiced by the population being protected (eg. Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative 2001). This dismissal speaks to the denial of decision making power to the feminized population in relations of masculinist protection.

While the use of protectionist language made the feminization of the population explicit; there was an implicit understanding that the government perceived the population as representative of a racialized masculinity that posed a threat to the nation-state. While the government maintains that forced displacement protected civilians, the lack of security or basic services in the ‘protected villages’ made it clear that the primary security concern was to secure the state by physically separating Acholi rebels from Acholi civilians, who were assumed to be collaborators due to their shared ethnic identity (Mwenda 2010). The process of moving civilians to the camps makes the assumed culpability of all members of the Acholi ethnic group obvious. In a story that was repeated time after time by the people I spoke with, Kevin explained:

The soldiers came to our house and said we had to leave. They gave us 24 hours to move to the camp. Anyone who wasn’t in the camp by the deadline would be assumed to be a rebel and shot on the spot. That’s what they told us, but if you didn’t move fast enough, they burnt down your house. Actually, they burnt down all of the houses – after taking the food stuffs and other things.

In 1999, Amnesty International reported that there were over 400,000 displaced persons in northern Uganda, and although some of them moved to the camps “spontaneously” while fleeing the LRA, others were either physically forced out of their

homes by government soldiers or made to feel that they had no choice about whether or not to leave (Amnesty International 1999). By the end of the war, the number of displaced had risen to 1.8 million and their stories of displacement were similar (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2008). In some cases, people were given 72 hours to move. In other cases they were forced to move immediately. Of the hundreds of formal and informal conversations I had with formerly displaced persons, no one described assistance in the move or feeling protected by the army. And when they arrived in the ‘protected villages,’ they found no shelter, no services, no provisions. In a typical account, one woman described being chased from her home in the middle of the night and seeking protection for herself and her six month old child:

I went to where they told us to go, but there was nothing there. No place to sleep. It was the middle of the night and I was scared. I lay down in the high grasses and then bent the grasses and tied them together across my body, hoping to make it difficult to see me and my baby. That was such a long night, just laying there, trying to keep the baby quiet so the LRA wouldn’t find us, the soldiers wouldn’t harass us, and no one would know we were there.

Even after the IDP camps became more establish and INGOs were present to provide food and services, the WHO estimates that there were over 50,000 excess deaths a year that were caused by conditions in the camps – not by armed violence or natural causes (World Health Organization 2005). If the concern were truly with protecting this population, then alternative security practices would have been implemented. Instead, people would laugh when the term ‘protected villages’ was used to describe the IDP camps. Anena voiced a common sentiment, stating:

In one breath they said the displacement was for our protection, but in the next breadth they said it was to cut off supplies to the LRA. So they assumed we were all giving our food stuffs to the LRA. Maybe some people did, maybe they were forced to. Fine, but is that a reason to starve an entire population? Talk about



being guilty until proven innocent – with no way to prove you are innocent. You were guilty because you were Acholi.

She went on to say,

What was protected about those villages? Definitely not the civilians – it was easier for the LRA to attack them, kidnap children and take supplies when everyone was in one place. If anything it was the army that was protected – you see, the barracks were in the midst of the camps. But they said it was for our protection.

Lived experiences of insecurity for the civilian population stemming from armed violence, lack of access to potable water and food, as well as rape and child neglect increased due to the displacement (Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative 2001; Weber, Rone, and Human Rights Watch 2003). Dolan (2011) argues that the displacement was social torture meant to simultaneously punish the Acholi and discipline the rest of the nation. The Acholi served as an example of what would happen to those that did not support the current regime. In this way, President Museveni's government used the war in northern Uganda to simultaneously discipline the northern population and to demonstrate national sovereignty at a time when international economic policies were dictating the national budget (Mwenda 2010). The difference between the rhetoric and practice of protection is evident in the design and implementation of the displaced persons camps in northern Uganda. While the population was rhetorically produced as feminized and in need of protection, their lived experiences spoke more to being treated as a threat to security interests. This construction of the northern population as threats and outsiders went beyond the official processes of forced displacement in northern Uganda. In the next section, I examine how unofficial processes of othering created geographies of insecurity for members of the Acholi ethnic group travelling outside of their home areas.

### **‘Kony’ Harassment and Mobility**

While the forced displacement was an official constraint on mobility for the northern population, informal and unofficial forms of harassment made movement difficult for members of the Acholi ethnic group when they travelled in other regions of the country. The assumed connections between Joseph Kony, the LRA, and the Acholi ethnic group evident in the national narrative of the war manifest in the use of the name ‘Kony’ as an ethnic epithet against the Acholi. Throughout my research, people would often mention the constant threat of being called ‘Kony,’ ‘Kony’s uncle,’ or ‘Kony’s wife’ when travelling. They told stories of these racial epithets being used by military personnel at checkpoints, by police officers in town, and by civilians on the streets of Kampala, the capital. As Rachel said,

If they saw you had darker skin<sup>4</sup>, they called you Kony. If they heard your accent, they called you Kony. If they knew you were from the north, they called you Kony. They would say things like “Hey Kony, what are you doing here?” or “Look at Kony’s wife there, why is she so far from her home?” or “How is the bush, Kony?”

These verbal harassments, and the physical assaults that often accompanied them, were a constant reminder of the othering of the north and its population. Notably, this racialized othering, while tied to a violent masculinity, mapped onto the bodies of both men and women and thus produced geographies of insecurity in which the gendering of the violence took priority over the gendering of the individual.

Given that this process of racialization drew heavily on ethnicity and kinship connections to characterize ‘the other,’ it is not surprising that the harassment intensified

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<sup>4</sup> The name ‘Acholi’ is derived from the Luo word ‘chol’ for black. Members of the Acholi ethnic group are generally characterized as having darker skin than the Bantu ethnic groups in the south.

the closer one's kinship ties to Kony. For that reason, people from Kony's home village of Odek experienced increased levels of harassment. Not only were they called Kony when travelling in other regions of the country, they were also harassed within northern Uganda. If they were identified as being from Odek, they would be called Kony's sister, brother, or some other variation on the theme. They would be blamed for atrocities perpetrated by the LRA.

This harassment led many people to make the strategic decision not to acknowledge their place of origin while traveling. If it was available to them, they would avoid speaking Luo in other parts of the country. They would keep a low profile so as to avoid being called out in a public setting. They would deny their northern origins if asked directly. Although not always successful in a national context where accent was more apparent, this last strategy was widespread amongst people in Odek travelling within northern Uganda. Auma summarized this tactic succinctly when she said, "When I had to go into Gulu town, I'd never say I was from Odek. Maybe Pader, maybe Kitgum, but never Odek." By attempting to conceal their place of origin, I argue that people were trying to distance themselves from the epicenter of the geography of the national narrative of the war that focused on an aggressive masculine other. The strategic decision of when to claim or deny one's origin was meant to protect the physical and emotional security of the individual. Such an act involved the negotiation of multi-scalar political relations and contributed to an embodied sense of security.

This denial of place of origin, however, did not come without its price. As one young man said to me,

I spent years denying I was Acholi. I lived with relatives in Kampala, going to school down there when all the schools up here became useless. There were not many Acholi around there, and I found it was easier to pretend I wasn't from the north. I spent so many years trying to hide my ethnicity as if it was something bad that I started to hate it about myself. I was ashamed of it. Now I take pride in it. I am back here [in Gulu] and working with young people so that they can be proud of their Acholi heritage.

This statement, although couched in the terms of ethnicity, is remarkably similar to the internalization of racism or “the acceptance, by marginalized racial populations, of the negative societal beliefs and stereotypes about themselves” (Williams and Williams-Morris 2000, 255). By (temporarily) accepting the narrative of ethnic difference that posits the Acholi ethnic group as primitive and inferior, this young man questioned his own self-worth. The repetition of racialized narratives of violence in northern Uganda together with the economic and political disenfranchisement of the region created the conditions for the internalization of oppression, a commonly acknowledged aspect of the psychological dynamics underlying oppression (eg. Fanon 1963; Freire 1970; Prilleltensky and Gonick 1996). In my conversations with young men and women who endured sustained harassment, they tended to take one of two approaches. They either internalized the racism or they became militant and defensive as I will discuss later. In either case, they were forced to define themselves via racial and ethnic hierarchies that othered the Acholi ethnic group within the nation-state.

### **‘Kony’ Harassment and Protest**

The use of the epithet Kony was not only reserved for harassing people who were supposedly out of place in terms of physical location. It was also used to discipline and delegitimize individuals who were engaging in the political sphere and making claims on

the state. The following excerpt from my field notes provides an example of how this occurred.

From our home, we could hear the bullets and the tear gas canisters hitting the ground. We could see the tires burning in the road. Army and police personnel were actively clearing the streets. On the radio, there were complaints of police brutality. Army and police officers were heard saying things like “I’m going to kill someone tonight” while beating people indiscriminately. Then there were the reports of the police and army referring to civilians as *Kony*. This infuriated the radio announcer who encouraged people to record what the police and army were saying with their mobile phones. Moments later, even as shots continued to echo through the streets, a police representative announced on the radio that things were now calm and people should go home. (April 14, 2011)

This event was not part of the war between the LRA and the Government of Uganda. It was an outbreak of violence connected to the Walk-to-Work campaign instigated by opposition leaders following the re-election of President Yoweri Museveni in February of 2011. Ostensibly protesting the rising fuel prices and general inflation, the Walk-to-Work campaign was commonly understood to be a challenge to President Museveni’s quarter century reign over the country. The protests originated in Kampala, the capital, but eventually spread to other urban centers throughout the country. Just as in Gulu, violence had erupted between the armed forces and civilians during many of the protests. Only in Gulu, however, were the protesters referred to as *Kony*. This label was meant to discredit the protests by characterizing all of the protestors as irrationally violent. The radio announcer’s swift reaction to reports of the epithet speaks to emotional and political power of the label ‘*Kony*.’

Official statements from government or military leaders never used the epithet ‘*Kony*’ to refer to people other than Joseph Kony. During the radio broadcast mentioned above, for example, the police representative was on the air with the radio announcer

when the reports of the use of the Kony epithet came in. Unlike the announcer, the police representative did not react. He neither denied nor condemned the use of such language. It was this type of implicit acceptance combined with the promotion of a narrative of northern violence that encouraged the use of the term 'Kony' amongst those seeking to assert power over members of the northern population. As the next section will demonstrate, the association of members of the Acholi ethnic group with Joseph Kony went beyond national discourses to affect transnational processes.

### **Threats to Transnational Solidarity and Peacebuilding**

The Ugandan discourse of holding the Acholi population for the LRA's violence was adopted by people in LRA-affected areas outside of Uganda. This affected the possibilities for solidarity as evidenced in two different attempts to build solidarity amongst all LRA-affected countries (at the time, this included the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Central African Republic (CAR), South Sudan and Uganda). The prejudice against the Acholi, however, was palpable.

As one organizer of a peace conference hosted in Gulu in 2007 explained:

These people [from DRC, CAR, South Sudan] came; we settled them in the hotel. When they came to dinner, they refused to eat. They were so bitter, they refused to eat. Their thinking was that we had sent our children [the LRA] there to do what they were doing. It took Archbishop Odama's diplomacy to convince them to eat. So when we went, the first day, to the conference, it was quarrel and quarrel. They really quarrelled. And we thought, now what do we do? And they were so bitter. I said, now I think it would be best for these people to go and look around. At the time people were still in the camps. So I organized a bus and invited them to go around. We took them around and they saw how people were living in the camps and they said 'Oh, so this thing was also bad here.' So

the next day we began to talk now. That opened things up and it was agreed that we should continue with that kind of meeting.

The tendency for delegates from other LRA-affected areas to hold the Acholi ethnic group responsible for the violence of the LRA continued into a 2010 peace conference. The goal of the conference was to share strategies and build alliances, however the delegates from northern Uganda were immediately called out for their connection to the LRA and blamed by other delegates for the violence. They were told that this was a Ugandan problem, an Acholi problem, and they should clean up their own mess that they should take Kony home.

One of the delegates, upon returning to Gulu, expressed his disappointment with the resistance he had felt at the conference that was supposed to be collaborative. When I asked him to elaborate, he said,

I tried to explain that although members of the LRA were of Acholi ancestry, the LRA was not a product of the Acholi ethnic group. I emphasized this point by describing how the LRA had terrorized Acholi civilians in the same way it was terrorizing other populations now. At first they did not hear me, but with time, I think I was successful in getting past this prejudice. It was hard, but we were eventually able to move on to talk about solidarity and collaboration.

His frustration with the experience makes evident the difficulties of unfolding the geographies of difference that laid blame for the violence of the region at the feet of the Acholi ethnic group.

In highlighting these four types of insecurity produced by racialized narratives of difference, I am drawing attention to the fact that geographic imaginaries of difference do not facilitate militarization in the abstract. Rather, the specific topography of these narratives of difference has material effects on people's lives. The placement of individuals in this geography, how their identities are read in relation to this terrain of

difference, can affect their physical safety; it can limit their mobility as well as their access to resources. It can also be used to negate their participation in the public sphere. This is not to imply that social relations were determined by these narratives of difference; but they were influential in shaping the material relations and embodied experiences of security during both the war and post-war periods.

### **Militarized Masculinities**

Having explored the racialization of the national war narrative and some of its material effects, I now focus on how this racialization was realized through gendered narratives of difference. The characterization of the Acholi as a martial race was specifically in reference to a perceived violent tendency within Acholi masculinity. Although this narrative of Acholi men as warlike was used to explain their militaristic behavior during the war, Dolan (2002) contends it was actually the conditions of war that encouraged such behavior. He argues that under the harsh conditions of war and displacement, the variety of masculinities that could be performed by non-combatants was diminished, leaving violence as one of the few options through which to assert one's masculinity. The preponderance of violent performances of masculinity, in other words, was a consequence of the militarization of the north rather than a cause of it.

In this section, I explore two aspects of the gendering of the war narrative. First, I examine the limited expressions of masculinities available to the northern population during the war. By using a relational approach to studying masculinity, I show the connections between civilian and military expressions of violent masculinity. I then



switch focus to explicitly non-violent expressions of masculinity in northern Uganda. I demonstrate how the men who publically claimed such masculinities tended to have social capital that allowed them to counter the prevalence and power of militarism, yet their voices still tended to be dismissed when they challenged military decisions directly. Both scenarios, the collapsing of masculinities and the dismissal of non-violent masculinities, undermine the assumption of the national war narrative that members of the Acholi ethnic group are inherently violent. Rather, this analysis opens up space for the analysis of complex systems of violence that are manifest in specific gender and race-based regimes.

### **Collapsing Masculinities**

The conditions of displacement and the associated lack of opportunities played a significant role in what Dolan (2002) refers to as the collapsing of masculinities, a narrowing of the variety of masculinities that are available for performance in a given situation. Gender identities in northern Uganda were connected to specific roles and responsibilities. When I asked about gender relationships, people would inevitably explain the different roles and responsibilities men and women had. In regards to farming, men were responsible for preparing the land while women were responsible for caring for crops as they grew. In regards to maintaining the homestead, men were in charge of finances including paying school fees but women were responsible for feeding their family. During displacement, it was virtually impossible for anyone to fulfill these roles and both men and women experienced a disconnect between gendered expectations and experiences (el-Bushra year). For men who had families, the inability to fulfill their

roles as provider and protector was emasculating (Dolan 2002). In describing life during the war, Michael said,

I was useless as a man. I could not provide for my family. I had had a healthy homestead. My cows were strong, my fields productive. My family was not rich, but they had what they needed. I could pay school fees, and I was able to help some of my brother's children after he passed away. But in the camp, I could do none of that. The NGOs were the ones feeding my family. The army was the one protecting them. And the worst part was not having anything to do. I just sat there. For years I just sat there with my life wasting away. We could not even have Wang-O; I could not educate my children.

Wang-O, which refers to gatherings around the evening fire, was historically a space when elders would mentor children and youth. Parables were told, lessons taught, and family work plans for the next day were decided. It was the time when everyone in a homestead came together after a long day of work. However, in the camps, Wang-Os were forbidden. Not only was there barely enough firewood for cooking, the light of the fires exposed people to the risk of attack. The conditions of the camp, in other words, disrupted the practices through which married men were able to assert their authority.

For younger men, life in the camps offered a different but related obstacle. Marriage and the associated role as head of household was a major expression of masculinity in northern Uganda, yet the war made marriage almost impossible. As Oloya said to me,

I was a youth in the camps, but I couldn't become a man. Who is a man who isn't married? Not a man. Yet there was no money for marriage. I could not pay a brideprice and none of my family had money to give me. We were all barely surviving in the camp. It was not until the war was over that I was able to get married and gain respect.

Oloya's situation during the war was typical. No one in the camps had the resources necessary for a traditional wedding. But if a man was not married, he was considered a

youth and not included in clan meetings, not supported in politics, and not given a say just about any communal decision-making process. However, having a child would afford a man some legitimacy whether or not the child was born in wedlock. Given the conditions of the war, it became common to call a woman as a man's wife if they were intimate, regardless of their legal status. While this may have provided some social capital for men, it left women in a precarious position because they had no clear recourse if a man shirked his parental responsibilities. Camp life, in other words, created a situation in which young men were encouraged to impregnate women but were not held responsible for the consequences.

The insecurities produced through these context specific sexual politics, however, were not a focus of the state's militaristic definitions of security and practices of protection. When I asked a Colonel in the UPDF to speak to the army's reputation for raping women or using their power to coerce women to have sex, he denied that it was an institutional problem by saying:

You can say individuals in the UPDF have a reputation. Individual members might have been found to have broken the law. Maybe because witnesses were not willing to provide testimony, they might have got away with it. Just like fair trial. We believe in fair trial, someone is innocent until proven guilty. [But the army] might also have a few of its own that might tarnish the good name of the military. They are rogue elements.

Any abuse of power, according to this Colonel, was an individual act and not part of complex power relations that shaped the expressions of masculinity available to either soldiers or civilians. Thus militaristic institutions, including the gender and sexual regimes they promoted, were not considered a source of insecurity and not included in the state's project to protect the civilian population.

Amongst the civilian population, the term ‘useless’ was commonly used to refer to youths and older men who were not contributing members of society; these were the individuals who were most often blamed for the thievery, rape, and interpersonal violence in the camps. While this was accepted to some degree during the war when there were few ways of being productive, it was seen as a problem of the post-war period. Oloya, continuing in his description of the difference between life in the camps and after, stated,

Many of my friends became useless. You see them in the trading center even now. They are the ones causing trouble, robbing people, drunk whenever they can afford it. They started that in the camps when there was nothing to do but now they don’t stop.

Oloya blamed the violence of this cohort of youth on the lack of opportunities, the harshness of life in the camps, and the violence of their everyday lives. The fact that they were stuck in that world of violence was what he found troublesome. He did not know how to get them out of the wartime mentality. Rather than their thievery, alcoholism and violence being an indication of their innate bellicose nature, many of the men became ‘useless’ through the conditions of life during the war.

Komakech was considered the opposite of a ‘useless’ man by his neighbors. He was touted as a success story. He had come of age during the war but had managed to establish a functioning homestead after the war. In the telling of his story, Komakech is explicit about his struggles to become a man through marriage and economic independence during the war.

I had no money, but I knew it was time for me to become a man so I needed money for the brideprice. I decided to join the army. I didn’t make much money, it was only 10,000 shillings a month [US\$7] but I was able to save. I saved for two years and then I got out. I married my first wife in 1997. We were living in the camps; I tried to start a business but people were jealous of me. They burnt down my store. They put a curse on me. I was very sick and almost died.

Komakech, who had joined the army in order to fulfill his own expectations of masculinity (namely getting married) never accepted the necessity of violence. He is currently an active member of MOK and spoke at length about the everyday practices of violence he saw both during and after the war as well as MOK's attempts to fight that violence. In addition, he was very critical of the army. When asked if the army could be successful at ending conflict, he said,

the military can't solve conflicts because they are such large organizations, but they are ruled by one person's ideas. Yet there are many other people in the army with different ideas which might not be the same as the person in charge. So you have that on both sides – two big men ordering armies that are really only a chaos of differing ideas, so in the end you only have more chaos.

As critical as Komakech was of violence in general and the military in particular, he had still depended upon the military to fulfill his expectations of masculinity. His masculinity was militarized even though he was explicit that it was not militaristic. He participated in state sponsored violence by joining the military only as a means of escaping the everyday violence of economic poverty; however, he disavowed the use of violence as soon as he had the resources to choose the lifestyle he desired.

In his writing on northern masculinities during the war, Dolan (2002) describes acts of violence perpetrated by both non-combatants and soldiers to argue that violence as a viable means of performing masculinity for non-combatants was a result of a relational politics of masculinity between soldiers and non-combatants. Soldiers, who were generally in more secure positions both economically and socially, would assert their power over both male and female civilians through acts of violence (El-Bushra and Ibrahim 2005). Although not officially sanctioned by the state (although indirectly

sanctioned by a lack of punishment), these individual acts of violence contributed to the processes and experiences of militarization in the region.

This relational politics of masculinity between soldiers and non-combatants was not always a racialized politics. As Komakech's story above illustrates, there were members of the Acholi ethnic group who joined the army. The militarized masculinity of the army provided men economic and social power. Not only could they gain economically, as evidenced by Komakech's story, they also were able to assert their power in other ways. In particular, many military men traded protection for sex and thus were seen by the civilian population as having more access to women (Dolan 2002). Sara described the situation in reference to the barracks located near the camp she lived in,

Soldiers rotated through the barracks. The army kept them moving, but while they were here, they would have wives. Women from camp would be with them in exchange for protection and maybe a little food. They would live like husband and wife until the soldier moved, then the woman would find a new husband. Akello – the woman who lives just down the road – she has a child from such a relationship. Her parents encouraged her to be with those men; they could not afford to feed her and hoped that it would gain the whole family more protection. Now Akello has this child and the father is nowhere around. She struggles to have enough food.

As Sara points out, the conditions for these exploitative sexual relationships went beyond the actions of individual soldiers. However, such relationships were usually discussed as a reflection of the moral character of the individuals involved. And while this abuse of power was practiced by soldiers from the north as well as those from other parts of the country, it was when it was practiced by soldiers from the north that it was portrayed by the government as being a cultural characteristic as was evidenced in Major General Kazini's statement quoted above in which he referred to the Acholi as genetically violent.

The militaristic collapsing of masculinities extended beyond the displacement camps in northern Uganda. A young man I interviewed from Gulu town was in a boarding school in Kampala during much of the war. His performances of masculinity in that setting, as described below, support Dolan's argument that the violent masculinity performed by members of the Acholi ethnic group was produced in attempts to assert power in situations where other paths had been denied them.

They feared us at that school. They knew not to mess with the Acholis. We stuck together; we supported each other, and we were brutal to others. But we had to be. There were only a few of us, and they would have harassed us endlessly if we hadn't showed them who was boss. They said we were primitive and violent; we showed them we were warriors. It was the only way to survive down there.

As this young man's experience demonstrates, the performance of a violent masculinity was not only a direct result of engagement with military personnel. Rather, the perpetuation of the conflict in northern Uganda continued to reinforce the national narrative of northern peoples as violent and thus limit the performances of masculinity available to individuals racialized as Acholi in a variety of spaces.

The promotion of a hegemonic militarized masculinity, and the associated collapse of alternative masculinities, was productive for the Ugandan state in two ways. First, it normalized militaristic mentalities, including the use of violence to solve problems. Second, it paradoxically based justification for increased military intervention to pacify the north on the assumed violence of the northern population (Dolan 2002). Building on these insights, I contend that the racialized geographic narrative of northern Uganda as violent obscured the relational politics of masculinity and processes of militarism that produced violence and insecurity in people's everyday lives.

### **Non-Militaristic Masculinities**

Dolan's (2002) analysis of collapsing opportunities for performing multiple masculinities via the proliferation of a hegemonic militaristic masculinity during the war challenges the racialized narrative of the war by offering an alternative explanation of violent practices amongst civilians. However, expressions of masculinity were not equally limited across the population. There were those who publicly opposed violence and militaristic practices. In this section, I explore how privilege and positions of authority facilitated the performance of non-militaristic masculinities. This analysis provides an intersectional analysis that goes beyond the co-constitution of ethnicity and gender to also take into account the effects of other aspects of identity such as age, class, religion, and educational level.

To begin, I turn to two male-dominated local organizations that spoke out publically against the war and challenged practices of protection that created violence and insecurity. Both Gulu Human Rights (GHR) and The Northern Peace Initiative (NPI) started during the war with the explicit aim of fighting human rights violations and facilitating peace at multiple levels. In the case of GHR, the leaders were predominantly male lawyers who were able to draw upon their educational status and their professional connections in the international human rights community to speak out against the violence perpetuated by both the LRA and the Government. Their profession and social status afforded them access to alternative masculinities that were not available to the general population. As George, a member of the organization, said,

The only reason we weren't killed during the war was because the government knew that we had connections to the international community. They knew that if



one of us disappeared it would be bad P.R. [public relations] for them. We used that security to be the voice for others who were in more vulnerable positions or did not have the access we did.

The organization's connection to actors and institutions scaled as international played a significant role in establishing their ability to perform non-militaristic masculinities. The sense of fulfillment that such work gave George became apparent in his discussion of the transition between the war and post-war periods.

During the war, there was always an emergency. There was always something to be fighting against, fighting for. As an organization we had a clear sense of what we were doing, of our purpose. Now it is not so clear. There are still a lot of things that need to be addressed, there is still a lot of violence, but it doesn't feel the same. I don't have the same feeling of success. I don't feel like I know how to protect people from the types of violence they experience these days.

Throughout this conversation, George repeatedly referenced the sense of fulfillment he had during the war. This is not to imply that he liked the war, but rather that he had a clear sense of self and sense of purpose. He knew what he could contribute. There was no disconnect between his expectations of masculinity and his ability to realize those expectations. While his status, authority and power were still realized in relation to the militaristic masculinities in the region, he was able to perform an oppositional masculinity through his professional status.

The non-violent performances of masculinity by the leaders of NPI were similarly based upon their professional authority. NPI's governing council is predominantly men who are the leaders of Anglican, Catholic, Muslim, Orthodox, Pentecostal, and Seventh Day Adventist sects/denominations. From these religious institutions they drew their authority as well as their mission to protect their constituencies. Similarly to GHR, they were able to speak out openly against the government-sponsored violence of the war due

to their international connections. Not only did they have support through their respective religious institutions, they also gained international attention and acclaim amongst the international peace activist community winning peace prizes from Japan, Spain and Ethiopia.

However successful their work was in facilitating peace negotiations and advocating for non-violent social relations, they were still hampered when dealing directly with militaristic masculinities. For instance, when the U.S. was debating a bill in 2010 that would increase military action against the LRA, an Acholi peace activist travelled to Washington, D.C. to suggest this was not the best way to support LRA-affected civilians. As he recounted his trip to me, he said,

I thought I had convinced some U.S. congressmen and women that there were non-violent alternatives, but when I met with military officials my optimism faded. You know how they are [he puffed up his chest and mimicked a hyper-masculine swagger]. They informed me that I didn't know how to handle the LRA or its leader, Joseph Kony. They implied I was naïve for suggesting anything other than military intervention. I returned home to the news that the bill had been passed.

While this man was able to claim authority through his position in a religious organization, his opinion did not carry the same weight in the U.S. governmental decision-making processes as U.S. military officials. In his recounting of this experience, and in particular his comical imitation of the military officers, he made clear his opinion of militaristic masculinities that gain authority through the promotion of militaristic mentalities that promote military interventions as the only option. Unlike the experiences described by George above, this man's experiences demonstrate that access to international actors did not necessarily translate into support. If the desires and opinions of the local organization did not align with those of international organization or

government, then it was unlikely that a cross-scalar alliance would be created. And when a non-militaristic organizations such as NPI was addressing the U.S. military about military interventions, it is not surprising that the militaristic mindset won out.

While the militaristic mindset is ostensibly based on the desire to protect, the leaders of NPI offered an alternative vision of protection. They argued that the military was in fact increasing insecurity amongst the civilian population and that authority figures such as themselves should be responsible for sustaining non-violent social relations on behalf of the general population. However, hierarchical masculinist relations were still supported by NPI's vision as their decision-making processes were dominated by men in privileged positions within religious institutions. In this way, it challenged the militaristic mentality while still perpetuating the protector/protected dichotomy (with the protected in the role of potential victim).

While GHR and NPI offer two cases of non-militaristic masculinities being performed in very high profile ways, there were other examples. For example, the widespread promotion of cultural practices of reconciliation to help end the war and reintegrate the former LRA soldiers reinforced a non-militaristic form of masculinity as it was usually the male elders who facilitated these practices of reconciliation (Baines 2007). The promotion of these cultural practices provided a means for certain men to assert their authority and perform forms of masculinity that had been denied them during displacement. The tension between militaristic and non-militaristic masculinities became more commonplace during the post-war period as alternative means of performing masculinity became available to a wider range of individuals. However, privilege was usually a key playing in the access to alternative masculinities as it was the professional

elite, the religious leaders, and the elders and cultural leaders who had the easiest access to non-militaristic performances of masculinities. Youth, those without education, and the resource poor tended to have fewer options available to them in the post-war period. It was amongst those populations that alcoholism, public displays of violence and the label 'useless' were most common.

### **Conclusion**

In Uganda, the state and military claimed the benevolent role of protector based on a racialized and gendered narrative of difference in which Acholi men were characterized as inherently violent. Joseph Kony and the LRA were, according to this narrative, a manifestation of the Acholi bellicose nature rather than a rebellion based on a historically and geographically specific moment. The government used this narrative to define security for both the nation and the civilian population of northern Uganda. Based on these definitions, militaristic practices of protection were instigated regardless of objections from those ostensibly being victim. Furthermore, the definitions of protection and security were based on racialized narratives of difference that contributed to lived experiences of violence. State-based militarized process of protection, in other words, created geographies of insecurity for those living in northern Uganda.

Importantly, the national narrative of northern violence was realized through the construction of an aggressive masculine other. Using a racialized rhetoric of a bellicose Acholi masculinity, the national narrative depicted all Acholi men as always already a potential threat. However, drawing upon Dolan's (2002) argument of collapsing

masculinities during war, I further argue that violence amongst the civilian male population was a product of a relational politics of masculinity in which a state-sponsored militaristic masculinity constrained the expressions of masculinity available to non-combatants. Few individuals had access to the social position necessary to actively counter this militarism during the war, but more possibilities are opening up in the post-war period.

In the next chapter, I delve more directly into the post-war period to show how the racialized narrative of violence during the war transforms into a development narrative that shapes decision-making processes. I also follow the relational politics of masculinities to examine how gendered hierarchies of power are perpetuated in the name of peacebuilding and development.

## Chapter 5

### **Narratives of Local Violence and the Politics of Peacebuilding**

Programming in the north should include more community peacebuilding activities and development programs should ensure that they mainstream peace and reconciliation practices, such as nonviolent dispute resolution and group dynamics, into their planned interventions.

-USAID report recommendation (2010)

In the previous chapter, I argued that the Ugandan government promoted a simplistic narrative of local violence that simultaneously reified the idea of a violent Acholi culture and justified state militarization in northern Uganda. This chapter follows this narrative of local violence as it moves from official periods of war and into the design of post-war peacebuilding and development programs. As the USAID recommendation cited above suggests, there is a focus on community peacebuilding projects within the post-war development agenda for northern Uganda. By drawing upon the narrative of local violence and focusing on interpersonal and group conflicts, these programs obscure structural violence perpetuated by the state or driven by global processes of capitalism and militarism. Post-war development is subsequently construed as a process of guiding the conflict-affected population away from their violent tendencies and towards peace and development and hence perpetuating the role of protectorship discussed in the last chapter.

Indeed, within the design of this post-war development programming exist paternalistic assumptions reminiscent of the protector role in the militaristic triad of protector/victim/aggressor discussed previously. The national, international, and local actors who design and implement peacebuilding programs on behalf of a conflict-affected population claim for themselves the supposedly benevolent role of protector. In so doing,

they construct their target population as aggressors perpetuating violence and impeding development or victims in need of protection from the negative consequences of aggressors' actions.

However, the protector/victim/aggressor triad as realized via development is different from its war-time expression. Within the norms of the development industry, the victim population is not simply to be protected. Rather, they are to be improved. This 'will to improve,' as discussed in Chapter 2, is a form of trusteeship (Li 2007) in which the designers of development programs demonstrate a sense of responsibility for the well-being of those determined to be in need of development and, in this case, peace. Hidden within its claims of support and empowerment, the will to improve draws upon paternalistic assumptions as trusteeship is based on "a claim to know how others should live, to know what is best for them, what they need" (Li 2007, 4). In the postwar landscape, this will to improve enables the shifted realization of the triad through programs labeled as peacebuilding. Government and NGO programs claim the role of protector as they encourage local populations to fight aggressive expressions of masculinities and build more peaceful communities where all people's rights are respected. The protector morphs into a trustee as the victim and aggressor shift into populations to be improved through empowerment (for former victims) and resocialization (for former aggressors). Thus post-war development programs produce anew aggressor and victim populations to justify their roles as protectors.

The development narrative of local violence, deployed by national, international, and local actors, provides a simple, if flawed, map to the sources of violence and underdevelopment in northern Uganda. Using Roe's (1991) description of development

narratives as a lens, it becomes clear that the narrative of local violence as the cause of insecurity and underdevelopment in northern Uganda functions not as an assertion of truth, but as a “caricature of reality” that tell a story without pretense of accuracy (p.296). As a development narrative, this focus on local violence is not expected to account for everyone’s experiences of violence in the region or even the majority of experiences. Analysis of such narratives reveals how they reinforce the assumptions necessary to justify a particular approach to project design, irrespective of their connection to reality (Roe 1991). This means the narrative of local violence, as a development narrative, continues even through there is research and popular consensus that post-war problems such as lack of food and housing, land disputes, and political disenfranchisement are tied to national, regional and international processes (USAID 2010). The narrative of local violence persists because it offers a useful means of creating a scalar differentiation between the protector/trustee and the population in need of improvement. For national and international actors, this scalar narrative isolates the causes of violence in northern Uganda and thus justifies peacebuilding efforts focusing on the northern population rather than their own potential involvement in systems of violence. For local actors, a redefinition of the local from the full region of northern Uganda to the rural areas allows for local NGO workers to disassociate themselves from the violence while aligning themselves with national and international funding agendas. Thus, in all cases, the development narrative of local violence supports the distinction between protector/trustee and the population to be improved.

My empirical analysis of the post-war narrative of local violence begins with a textual analysis of the Government of Uganda’s Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan



(PRDP) for northern Uganda. This demonstrates that the narrative of violence from the war continues into the post-war period via the argument that local sources of violence are the key impediments to peace and development in the region. In this revised narrative, the civilian population is portrayed as the obstacle to their own peace and development. In addition, this narrative positions national and international actors outside of the violence and allows them to assume the paternalistic role of trustee - of knowing what is best for the conflict-affected population.

The PRDP represents what Branch (2011) calls the new ‘total intervention’ approach to conflict. As discussed in Chapter 2, the ‘total intervention’ framework, which I also refer to as the integrated approach, purports that violence leads to the internal breakdown of social order in a number of domains, including political, economic, legal, social and cultural. These social breakdowns can create further violence. Hence, any deviation from international norms of peace and stability indicate potential violence and thus justify interventions. This uniquely post-war mission of development programming, one which targets assumed drivers of conflict, could hypothetically reveal more complex systems of violence and hold a wide range of actors and institutions accountable for their role in perpetuating violence and underdevelopment. However, in practice, the total intervention approach to post-war development tends to maintain the status quo (Hewitt and Duffield 2009; Branch 2011). In northern Uganda, the narrative of local violence facilitates this promotion of the status quo by reinforcing the protectorship triad of post-war development programs. Development experts assume the paternalistic role of trustee to guide the conflict-affected population, as both victims and aggressors, away from war and towards peace and development.

The analysis of the PRDP leads into an examination of the experiences of national and international discourses of peacebuilding and development as they were assessed and implemented by local NGO workers in northern Uganda. Even as these local NGO workers critiqued the limited definitions of violence perpetuated by the focus on the local, they found it programmatically useful for delineating target populations, clarifying program objectives, and attracting funding. I begin by examining the ways these NGO workers show how the actions of those in the role of protector can be interpreted as acts of aggression and thus challenge the claims of benevolent protectorship from national and international actors. Yet, even with these insights NGO workers do not dismiss outright the role of protector. Rather, they claim the role for themselves by redefining the concept of 'the local' within the narrative of local violence to disassociate themselves from the sites of violence. Urban, professional NGO workers thus assumed the role of protectors/trustees for the rural, resource poor populations, effectuating the triad through geographic conceptualizations of where 'local' problems exist. Indeed, their will to improve was manifest in the design of programs meant change the behaviors of the rural population. Programs designed to identify local sources of violence focus on particular behaviors, especially particular performances of masculinity, within the war-affected population. This gendered narrative of violence returns to the protectorship triad as it positions rural men as potential aggressors and rural women as potential victims. By offering alternative readings of three positions of the triad from the perspective of local NGO workers, I show how protectors can be aggressors, how aggressors and victims can be protectors, and how victims can be revictimized through acts of protection.

### **The Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan for Northern Uganda**

In this section, I use the Government of Uganda's Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) for northern Uganda (2007) as the basis to examine how national and international actors position themselves as protectors/trustees of a troubled population. I offer a textual analysis of the document to show how the development narrative of local violence permeates its rhetoric and positions national and international actors outside of the sphere of violence. I also note the will to improve that infuses this work; the goal of improving northern Uganda so that it can 'catch up' with the rest of the country.

#### **Impediments to Peace and Development: The northern population as aggressor**

From the very beginning of the PRDP, impediments to peace and development in the region are presented as a problem of the northern population. Take, for instance, the following statement which was made by President Museveni as part of his directive to the committee charged with writing the PRDP. He writes,

The recovery of northern Uganda is [dependent upon]...the re-education and reorientation of the minds and hearts of the population towards peace and development rather than war. (p.19)

By focusing on the problematic mentality of the war-affected population, President Museveni reinforces the idea that the Acholi are inherently violent, a key aspect of the war narrative discussed in the previous chapter. Post-war peacebuilding initiatives,

following this logic, must focus on the ‘re-education’ and ‘reorientation’ of the northern population away from aggression and towards peace.

The following statement, drawn from the introductory paragraph on peacebuilding in the PRDP, follows in Museveni’s example and offers an illustration of the document’s tendency to define threats to peace as problems of the local population:

Northern Uganda holds a large proportion of the country’s population which has been affected by violence and war over the last two decades. In turn, there are many latent conflicts which exist between individuals, families, ethnic groups, and between civilians and government authorities (p.94).

This passage concentrates on interpersonal conflicts at the household and community level. Peacebuilding interventions following this framework tend to focus on a local violent masculinity as the reason that such latent conflicts turn violent. The aggressor is clearly located amongst the northern population.

Notably, the authors of the PRDP acknowledge the tension between civilians and government authorities, but this recognition shifts quickly to rearticulations of the conflict as local. The same paragraph goes on to say that, “if rule of law and basic social services are delivered by local authorities in an accountable and transparent way, conflict management is in turn strengthened” (p.94). This and similar statements throughout the document distinguish between local and national processes of governance. Local administrators are held responsible for a lack of good governance. Further, the processes of decentralization characterizing President Museveni’s reign (e.g. the marked increase from 39 districts in 1995 to over 110 in 2010) can be seen as a strategy by which the central government disconnects from local conflicts. National processes of reconciliation are effectively removed from consideration through these narratives of local violence.

Even when the PRDP acknowledges that, “some of the conflicts [experienced in northern Uganda] have cross-regional and cross-cultural as well as international dimensions” (p.96), peacebuilding initiatives are never offered to redress this admission. For example, in the list of conflict resolution objectives outlined on the following page, the focus is almost exclusively on community reconciliation and increasing local administrative effectiveness. When positioned within the larger context of the PRDP document, the singular acknowledgment of cross-regional, cross-cultural and international dimensions only emphasizes the authors’ shallow engagement with multi-scalar systems of violence. Northern Uganda’s problems are clearly located within the violent tendencies of the northern population according to this narrative. The aggressor is thus established, but confusion exists as this role is fulfilled by the same population that is simultaneously portrayed in the role of victim.

### **In Need of Intervention: The northern population as victim**

At the same time that the northern population is represented as aggressive, it is also presented as a victim of the war. For example, while linking traditional development concerns (ie. economic growth and poverty reduction) to peacebuilding, the introduction to the PRDP identified the war as the reason for underdevelopment in the north.

Since the 1990s, the Government of Uganda (GoU) has been promoting a development agenda that has led to a reduction in poverty nationally, with visible improvement in many of the welfare indices. The number of Ugandans who are unable to meet their basic needs declined from 56% in 1992 to 38% in 2003 and further to 31% in 2006 with a simultaneous improvement in other indices relating to access to health, education and water and sanitation. However, the welfare indices for Northern Uganda have not improved at the same pace as the rest of the

country. Income poverty remains significantly high, literacy rates are low and access to basic services is poor. The presence of prolonged conflict in the North for over 20 years is the most important factor explaining the poor living conditions in the North. (p.vi)

In other places in the document, northern Uganda's development is said to be 'behind' (p.iii), 'lagging' (p.25) and 'retarded' (p.15) in comparison to the rest of the country. An anachronistic narrative of development, imbedded in such descriptions, stems from the modernization theory of development in which underdeveloped regions are simply further behind on the ladder of progress. This narrative does not account for the relational nature of development but instead simply states that because of its victimization during the war, the north was disconnected from the success story of the rest of the country and development planning is seen as a way to help the region 'catch up.'

While there are plans for large scale industrial growth to bolster the economy of northern Uganda, particularly in terms developing sugar, biofuel, and fruit processing industries as well as a hydroelectric power plant on the Nile, the PRDP makes clear that none of this can happen until the region is stabilized politically and militarily (p.76). Initial foci for the post-war period, therefore, include population resettlement and the expansion of the agricultural sector upon which more than three-fourths of the population depends (p.78). Building on the government's Plan for Modernization of Agriculture, the PRDP lays out a plan to help households gain food security while integrating them into wider agricultural markets. While the plans for economic development in the region involve small-scale farmers and concern for food security rather than just large-scale industrialization can be seen positively, the presence of the development narrative of local violence should not be ignored. Implicit in the development plans of the PRDP is

the notion that the region's future development is dependent upon the local population's ability to focus on productive economic activities rather than conflict. So while they may be victims of the war, the local population is also held responsible for the lack of productivity in the region. In other words, they must be protected from themselves through improvement programs. The line between victims and aggressors is blurred in this development narrative, except, as I shall discuss below, when it comes to interpersonal violence. In cases of individual and community-level conflict, the specter of a violent Acholi masculinity returns to the narrative to separate potential victims from aggressors along gender lines.

### **National and International Peace Experts: Claiming the role of protector**

From the beginning, the PRDP emphasizes the need for *expert* interventions to 're-educate' and 're-orient' the troubled population. The PRDP lauded national and international agencies as the source of technical knowledge necessary to stop cycles of violence in the region (p.95). The paternalistic notion that such experts knew what was best for the northern population was perpetuated by international NGOs, as represented by the following statement by an INGO staff member from the U.S.:

You can't really give grants to a local implementing partner in northern Uganda and expect them to manage it. They don't have the capacity to handle the money, follow all the rules and regulations. So you really need an intermediary like us to manage and oversee the projects in a really close manner. Not only on the administrative side, but also on the programmatic side. Right at the beginning of the recovery, at the beginning of our program, there were so many poor proposals that we received. There was nobody with any ideas or really smart concepts for the recovery. I mean, I know...but there was a lot of good...there were some good

organizations, they just needed some guidance, some push to try some new techniques.

The need for peace and development experts to guide the population is echoed by a wide range of development documents ranging from International Alert's 'Building a Peace Economy in northern Uganda' to Oxfam's plan for 'rescuing northern Uganda's transition' to Care's program for empowering local women. In this narrative the role of peace or development expert, is charged with helping the war-affected population learn how to manage their conflicts and become productive. The basic tenet of intervention in northern Uganda that promotes the problematic idea that program implementers are separate from the systems of violence they are addressing colors the good intentions of the will to improve of these organizations. National and international actors are disconnected from the violence as the war becomes depoliticized; the violence of the war becomes simply a historical fact from which local conflicts emerge.

The PRDP did not only distinguish between protectors and victims/aggressors; it also provided a framework by which actors claiming the role of protector/trustee built alliances. The PRDP proposes collaborations between governmental and non-governmental stakeholders such as INGO's, the World Bank and UN agencies to 'facilitate' the peacebuilding programs for northern Uganda. For example, the World Bank funded programs that were then administered by the Ugandan Office of the Prime Minister. International agencies could demonstrate a nationally-sensitive program by aligning their work with the PRDP. The collective will to improve the lives of people in northern Uganda justified all of these alliances.



To summarize, PRDP presents a very simplistic peacebuilding narrative in which national and international actors express an earnest will to improve the northern population, a population that is plagued by the legacy of the war. Within this logic, it is reasonable that no processes of reconciliation at the national level or accountability for international actors are included in the peacebuilding programs outlined by the PRDP. National and international actors are only perceived as protectors, never as aggressors or victims of violence. Post-war peacebuilding schemes thus focus on non-violent conflict resolution techniques to address the aggressive tendencies of the war-affected population.

Having established the usefulness of the narrative of local violence in constructing and maintaining relations of power between national and international actors, I turn now to the negotiation of this narrative by local NGO workers. As implementing partners, local NGOs and their employees were fundamental to the peacebuilding industry in northern Uganda. However, this meant that NGO workers from northern Uganda had to navigate a narrative of local violence (to which they could ostensibly be connected as either aggressors or victims), their own desire to fulfill the role of trustee and improve the conditions of others, and their need for a job. I draw upon the experiences and opinions of NGO workers from northern Uganda to demonstrate how, even as the narrative of local violence persists in the design of peacebuilding programs, local actors challenge and adapt the distribution of protectorship roles.

## **Challenging the Role of Protector**

Despite the rhetoric of benevolence on the part of national and international actors, many of their actions were read as expressions of aggression by people living in the region. In this section I examine some of these critiques as made by local NGO workers. These are individuals who are a part of the peacebuilding and development programs, yet they are still critical of the role of national and international actors. I begin by exploring their critiques of state-based actors, both domestic and international, and then turn to concerns about how the institutional practices of the development industry impact the potential of peacebuilding programs in the region. By analyzing their critiques, I show how supposedly protective acts can perpetuate violence and (re)victimize vulnerable populations.

### **Protectors as Aggressors**

In northern Uganda, the PRDP was rarely taken seriously. People viewed it as a series of empty promises. Ochora, for example, is an NGO worker's whose projects were supposed to contribute to the PRDP, but his assessment of the PRDP was as follows:

In that document [the PRDP], you find that the peace component was not implemented anywhere by the government. Then when you go to recovery, you find that some work was done in the health sector – either renovation or a staff quarters, but without medications. When you go to schools, you find something is done, but too little to call it a PRDP. So, that implementation was, I don't know if that's the right English – a sham.

Similarly, an Acholi delegate to a national conference on women's rights spoke up about the PRDP when asked to assess the situation of the north. She said,

In the north, our struggles are connected to the war. Our communities, our infrastructure, our institutions have not recovered from decades of fighting. The government said it would give us support through the PRDP, but we don't see it. Where are the roads? Where are the clinics? Where are the teachers for our children? Who is eating the money of the PRDP?

These questions were directed to a Woman Minister of Parliament from northern Uganda who responded by saying that the monies of the PRDP had not been as much as expected. She was referring to the fact that the PRDP's budget was based primarily on international funds that were not yet committed, and as new international humanitarian 'hot spots' gained attention, they drew funds away from the region. She went on to say that the monies that do exist for programs have had little effect on the ground because "recent redistricting increased bureaucratic costs and made implementation difficult." In other words, government bureaucracy combined with the capricious nature of international funding drained money from the economically and politically disenfranchised region even as the rhetoric of peacebuilding and development called for support and intervention. The national and international actors, supposedly acting as trustees of the northern population, were not fulfilling their responsibilities.

This lack of involvement on the part of national actors is identified as not merely an absence but an active impediment to the peacebuilding process. For instance, in a discussion about the process of resettlement, Komakec, a program coordinator for a local NGO, said,

We try to help people resettle, to rebuild their lives and communities, but where is the government in all of this? The government forced people into IDP camps, but then told them to voluntarily go back home. Under normal circumstances, they

should have told people, now you've lost your home, you have no homes, so each one must come up with a proposal of how he's going back home so that we can build for everybody a home to go back to. That's a kind of government plan that's good for resettlement.

Komakec believes resettlement requires more than merely 'empowering' the local population. Rather, it necessitates tackling historical wrongs that have left the population resource poor. Komakec is disheartened not only by the lack of reparations offered to the northern population, but also what he sees as the government's perpetuation of geographies of difference at the expense of real peace between communities. As he said,

The president comes and promises the some of the Langi people that they would get reparation for what the LRA did. That is a politically motivated statement and the intention may not be to pay them but for a divide and rule so that he's seen..he's liked by one group of people and hated by another. So he's dividing the Acholi and the Langi.

Such projects of political manipulation are understood to contribute to the tensions and conflicts that arise in northern Uganda. In critiques such as Komakec's, the government is portrayed as an aggressor rather than a protector (which is consistent with the meta-narrative of government betrayal found in northern Uganda (Bøås 2004)). Peacebuilding programs focus to near exclusion on interpersonal and community-level conflict, leaving state-based sources of aggression, unaddressed.

The militarized relationship between the U.S. and Uganda was another means by which national and international actors were shown to be hypocritical in their claim to the role of protector. For example, while the U.S. government, primarily through USAID, has been the largest funder of development and recovery programs in northern Uganda, U.S. policy limited the peace negotiation efforts during the conflict. Walter, the former head of a combined national-international peace initiative in the region clarified this contradiction

in his discussion of the funding for the two mandates of his organization, to broker peace between the fighting elements and to help rebuild communities. He said:

Now, sometime along the way, the Betty Bigombes [peace negotiators] were trying to talk peace but the Government of Uganda managed to convince the U.S. that the LRA is a terrorist group. So the US foreign policy says that there should be no negotiation with terrorists. And in that sense, for our mandate number one, they just automatically cut the budget to zero.

Walter's organization was left with no resources to address the causes of violence, the conflict between the LRA and the Government of Uganda. Instead, he was forced to put all of his energies into grassroots reconciliation and community building. As he made clear, although important, such work could not function without also addressing the causes of the war. Because they forbid the use of resources to negotiate peace, Walter held the U.S. government along with the Ugandan government accountable for the extended duration of the war in northern Uganda. He put them in the role of aggressor rather than protector. In the post-war period, this meant that he did not trust their intentions and often found their calls for local peacebuilding efforts hypocritical.

The program director for a USAID project, Tom, implied a similar critique as he discussed a conflict sensitivity training his staff had been mandated to perform by USAID. Conflict sensitivity training to understand the “two-way interaction between activities and context and acting to minimize negative impacts and maximize positive impacts of intervention on conflict...” (CSC 2013) is meant to engage with all aspects of an organization, but Tom met significant resistance from the national and international portions of their organization. As he said:

We did this thing called conflict sensitivity mainstreaming. And a lot of it was supposed to focus on U.S. government programs and partners and the embassy, but there happened to be very little interest or buy-in from the U.S. government

for that, even though they were asking for it. And a lot of interest from the local people for it, and it wasn't even intended to be for them.

The representatives of national and international USAID offices he spoke with did not hold themselves or their institutions responsible for violence in northern Uganda and therefore did not make it a priority to evaluate their role in past or developing conflicts. The assumption being that conflict sensitivity training was only appropriate for those in the role of aggressor (ie. local actors) and not for the protectors and trustees attempting to improve the conflict-affected region. While Tom was more guarded in his critiques than Walter and never explicitly stated the implications of this lack of accountability for USAID's role in creating and perpetuating violence, his frustration made it clear that he thought some self-reflexivity would have been useful.

The most common critique of government and INGO interventions was that the people involved were 'eating money.' This phrase encompassed both corruption and wasteful expenditures. For example, if a government project had funds for a new road but then the road was only half paved, people spoke of the government officials 'eating the money' that should have been used for the road. Similarly, when people walked past an INGO parking lot with 27 expensive white SUVs, they would often joke that the INGO was 'eating money.' In both cases, the concern was that state and international agencies were exploiting funds that should have been used to help the region recovery from the war. Mary, an NGO office assistant, made this critique explicit when she said,

They come here. They ask us what our problems are. They say they want to help. Then they go and apply for big grants. They get big money in our name. And then what? They sit in their offices and they eat the money. That money was supposed to be for us. It was supposed to help us. We are the ones without homes or food, but they are the ones eating money.

Mary's directed her frustration specifically at organizations and agencies that took advantage of the post-war landscape to line their own pockets. Such acts represented intentional exploitation and manipulation of the resources allocated for the region. In the next section, I discuss less direct forms of aggression on the part of the development industry by relating the experiences of local NGO workers to show institutional norms that perpetuate structural violence in the name of protection.

### **Organizational Norms as Aggression**

Sara is a project manager for an American NGO sponsored by USAID; her project was designed as a three-year transitional program to help the region reorient from conflict to peace. Sara speaks at length about how funding decisions limit the potential of her work. For example, she voices her exasperation while speaking about the three-year timeline of her project. She expresses a feeling of betrayal from the people she worked with as she says,

The people on the ground, they say: you came on board, we started crawling a little bit and you left us before we could run in case something tried to catch us up. We said sorry.

She makes this last statement with bitterness and frustration. "All we could say," she repeats, "was sorry." The three-year design of the project provided barely enough time to initiate a project and certainly not enough time to organize a follow-up. "We say they need help to rebuild their lives, but then we give them nothing useful and blame them for not succeeding. We say they didn't take advantage of what we offered." Sara was

angered by what she called a lack of commitment to the beneficiaries and to the work being done by the workers. As she said,

There was nothing in the design of our project...you know they called it a pilot project and they wanted us to do this innovative approach and meet these needs of everybody, but to do it on a limited scale on a small geographic area. If they wanted to test something there was no mechanism to scale it up. There was no fund, there was no serious commitment from the beginning to scale anything we were doing up. So we've had to really lobby the USAID to first make them understand what we're doing and then give us the opportunities were for scaling up. But with USAID, we've talked to them a lot, but as our program ends in three weeks, there's not one single thing that I can say will be scaled up through USAID.

As Sara indicates, the short funding cycles make it difficult for many organizations to design long-term interventions that could make structural changes. Instead, funding forces them to address short-term symptoms of larger issues.

Furthermore, those working in the industry also identified the narrow mandates of NGOs as a structural problem. As Komakec said,

Many of these organizations have their unique mandates – and it's usually tied to their funding, and what their funders want them to do. You can't tell them to begin and start addressing questions...they're just fixed to what they're doing. I feel that many of the NGOs fall into that category. We struggle with that here, but we dream of being financially independent so we would have the freedom to do what we think needs to be done.

As an example of this tunnel vision within mission statements, Emmanuel works for an Italian NGO which explicitly states that its goal is to “promote peace building initiatives targeting the youth members of the economic groups and their communities.” Although his organization focuses exclusively on peacebuilding amongst local actors, Emmanuel perceives the importance of larger processes. When I asked him what the obstacles were to peace, he immediately responded by identifying regional issues, specifically economic.



We need to have good connections to markets in order for development to occur. There's so much potential these days for trade with Sudan and throughout the East African Community. But our farmers can't get their produce to those markets. The roads are bad; we don't have the infrastructure; the markets aren't easy to access for poor farmers. But development can't happen if we don't have peace, and I don't just mean the end of war. I mean peace as the conditions for well-being and prosperity.

As Emmanuel pursued the relationship between peacebuilding and development further, he made connections between local and national governance and spoke about the historical disenfranchisement of northern Uganda. As with other NGO workers, Emmanuel understood and internalized the contradiction between the work he was doing and these larger structural issues. He admitted the limited impacts of their work due to this disconnection. Still he continued his work because he felt he was accomplishing something and because he did not want to jeopardize his job.

These types of institutional structures, including the funding cycles, the narrow mandates, and the precarity of the workforce, all contribute to peacebuilding programs that do little to address the complex systems of violence that characterize the post-war landscape of northern Uganda. Instead, such programs maintain hierarchical power relations and the unequal distribution of resources. In so doing, they perpetuate forms of structural violence in the name of providing protection and guidance for the very population they are subordinating. However, this does not mean that the subordinated population passively accepts this situation. In the next section, I examine how local NGO workers (re)claim the narrative of local violence to position themselves in the role of protector and trustee.

## **Claiming the Role of Protector**

### **Supporting the Practices of Peacebuilding**

In this section, the stories of Emmanuel, Sara and Komakec, three differently located NGO workers, illustrate trends within the local NGO workers' experiences. As mentioned earlier, Sara is a project manager for an American NGO sponsored by USAID; her project was designed as a three-year transitional program to help the region transition from conflict to peace. Emmanuel heads youth-based programming at an Italian NGO that has a long term engagement with northern Uganda. Finally, Komakec is the program manager of an Acholi NGO that started during the war and is currently run on international funding. Even though they all hold different positions within the hierarchical structure of NGOs and within the NGOs they work for, each one adapts the narrative of local violence in similar ways. They rescale the local so as to distance themselves from sources of local violence and then claim the role of protector/trustee via their position as peace expert. Before getting to this redefinition of the local, however, this chapter shows how they displace their critiques explored above, and construct peacebuilding positively.

From Emmanuel's perspective, the total intervention approach to peacebuilding is a useful way of addressing the complex issues youth deal with in the post-war context. He describes his program as follows:

Our goal is to help youth resettle into their communities after the years of war and displacement. We have selected key individuals and trained them as peace activists. We consider them 'implementing beneficiaries' because they are the ones implementing the programs but they are also the ones benefiting from them.

Together with them, we have designed a wide range of activities ranging from sports to music and dance to dialogues to economic initiatives.

After listening to Emmanuel describe the sports programs, the music initiatives, and the income generating activities (IGAs), I asked him how these activities qualified as uniquely peacebuilding given their ubiquity in other development contexts. He replied as follows:

It is the intention with which we do activities. As we introduce ideas or activities to the groups, we always talk about how these could contribute to peacebuilding. There are always trainings about peace and reconciliation associated with our programs. For example, we sit the youth down to talk about nonviolent conflict management techniques before a sports event. We talk with the IGA groups about group dynamics as they are designing their projects. Peacebuilding is more of qualitative thing – it isn't easy to measure its effect. But we put it into everything we do.

This approach to integrating peacebuilding into development programs was evident across the region. An individual applying for a micro-finance loan would be required to go to non-violent conflict resolution training before receiving the loan. An educational initiative received funding to design a 'conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding' curriculum for local schools. An agricultural extension program included community-building initiatives to deter violent land disputes during the resettlement process. Sara's program, as another example, is focused on building peace economies across the region. As she explained,

We used an integrative approach, we are looking at economic securities, educating their capacities on farming and livelihoods, and their sustainability, and looking into how they're relating. We don't leave them on the hardwares of economic security. Access to justice comes in to address the disputes between them. In cases of land disputes, what do they need to do? In cases of misunderstanding between them, which was common, what do they need to do? ...then peace and reconciliation will come in to say what are some of the activities we can bring in to promote reconciliation between them. For example, sporting activities, guidance and counseling. So that makes it a full package.

When I asked her to expand on how economic programs connected to peacebuilding and reconciliation, she said,

In our grassroots program, we dealt with reintegrating the people. It meant getting the returnees and the host communities to form groups, they identified projects, usually labor intensive, that they could work on. Now, the thinking was that as they work on these projects, they begin to forget their differences. Then, at the end of the day, because this is income generating, they sit down and agree on a dividends policy. That helped reconcile people and get them accepted.

Just as with Emmanuel's project, peacebuilding is accomplished in Sara's program through more traditional economic and community building activities. Such activities provide a platform through which to address interpersonal and community-level conflicts.

Unlike Emmanuel and Sara's projects which use development models to do peacebuilding, Komakec's organization entered into development work through peacebuilding. He describes their work as follows:

These days we are trying to meet people's needs in new ways. During the war we focused on advocacy and negotiations. We were trying to end the war and get people out of the camps. Now those things have happened, at least here in Uganda, so we are now trying to address people's needs as they resettle. We are working on reconciliation, non-violent conflict resolution, and empowerment. But we found that we can't do those things without dealing with land conflicts, poverty, lack of access to schools and clinics. We're not a big NGO, we can't do all those things, but we can't succeed at our mission without addressing them.

As Komakec indicates, the integration of peacebuilding and development projects addresses real needs within the war-affected population. From the perspective of Emmanuel, Sara, Komakec, and the dozens of other NGO workers I interviewed, integration is positive. Not simply an imposition from national and international actors, it provides a potentially useful alliance for those attempting to tackle the complex relationships between violence and development in the region. Nevertheless, this

integration remains framed by the narrative of local violence in northern Uganda. In the next section I examine how these three NGO workers negotiate this narrative by redefining the local as rural.

### **Redefining the ‘Local’ as Rural**

Our people in the villages, they are the ones struggling the most. They are the ones we are trying to help. They have been living for years in camps; their lives have been so very difficult. We are trying to help them get re-established, to rebuild their lives.

Komakec made this statement as he described a program his organization had just received funding for. Such statements were a typical way by which urban-based NGOs separated themselves from their beneficiaries. Such statements resonate with claims of protectorship identified in the PRDP, except here the division between protector and population to be improved rests on divisions between urban/rural, educated/uneducated, professional/resource poor. The conflicts being managed are primarily within and amongst this rural, uneducated, resource poor population. A re-examination of Sara’s statement quoted above makes this clear. She refers to “disputes between them,” “misunderstandings between them,” “promoting reconciliation between them,” and helping them “forget their differences.” In all cases the ‘them’ refers to the beneficiaries of the program. *They* need guidance and support in order to change the culture of conflict and build economies of peace. For instance, in relation to a program for peacebuilding amongst the youth, Sara said,

*We* are doing peace education in secondary schools and this is basically looking at building a culture of peace in the communities, trying to encourage the children to

learn from the onset that it's their initiative to ensure that there's peace, and when you look at the children, the youth, *they* are the labor for any uprising, or any riots, for any war, *they* are used as the resource, so it's just trying to change *their* mind, *their* perception towards violence.

In a similar vein, Emmanuel's discussion of youth empowerment focuses on how his program helps youth change their behaviors and attitudes to become less violent and more self-reliant. He identifies the culture of dependence as a major concern.

Our economic initiatives are meant to break the culture of dependency that was identified by a UN official. It has been written about as a problem here in northern Uganda after the years of living in camps. In a culture where traditionally you would never have people asking you for food and money, now when you go to the village, people do just that. It used to be that they would be the ones offering you food.

In this statement, Emmanuel locates cultural problems in the village, which I have already noted is often code for a rural, uneducated population. Further, he accepts the rhetoric of a culture of dependency that is said to plague the recipients of humanitarian aid. Within international discourses, those concerned with dependency assume that first, dependency is something negative that comes from the extended provision of aid and, second, it undermines independence, self-sufficiency, and self-reliance (Harvey and Lind 2005). For Emmanuel, the culture of dependency is symptomatic of a breakdown in traditional cultural values of independence and hospitality. He aims therefore to encourage the youth to find ways to work together to support themselves and not be reliant on aid agencies. As he said,

Our goal is to inspire the youth to come up with creative initiatives based on the resources they already have – not based on someone else giving them resources. Outside funding should help you increase the scale of your activities, but it shouldn't be the reason for it to succeed or fail. You shouldn't blame outside funders for your lack of success. So we are asking youth to come up with ideas, to get together in groups and submit proposals. We have 39 such groups so far.

As Emmanuel describes his program, he clearly wants to help empower the youth he works with. The IGA projects strive to empower youth by showing them how they can become responsible and independent economic actors. He does not attempt to challenge the systems that produce uneven development but rather tries to give disenfranchised youth a chance to feel connected and productive. With that same intention in mind, he designs sports competitions as well as music and dance programs with the goal of “promoting unity” and building a sense of self-worth among participants.

Emmanuel, Sara and Komakec all demonstrate a genuinely felt will to improve through their actions and commitment to improving the lives of people in northern Uganda. However, as Li (2007) points out, irrespective of good intentions, such a will to improve maintains the problematic assumption that the expert knows what is best for the target population. Within in the post-war landscape, NGO workers claim authority by distancing themselves through their programs from the sources of conflict that their interventions are meant to address. Thus the narrative of local violence is perpetuated through programs designed to address the interpersonal conflicts within particular populations.

## **Conclusion**

Given the narrative of local violence which drives the design of peacebuilding in northern Uganda, it is not surprising that there are virtually no peacebuilding projects targeting national and international actors. There are no substantial projects of justice and reconciliation that engage with the structural inequalities developed before and during the

two decades of active warfare - structural inequalities that continue to isolate northern Uganda from economic and political systems of power. Those efforts that do exist to create a national dialogue have not met with political support. The Refugee Law Project, for example, drafted a national reconciliation bill which was sent to parliament almost ten years ago. To date, however, the bill is still idle in parliament and has never been discussed. As one UN official said to me following the 2011 general elections, there was a disappointing lack of any presidential candidate taking the election campaign as an opportunity to make a new social contract with the north. Instead, he lamented, it was business as usual. The national narrative of the war as a 'northern issue' allows the post-war narrative to focus on the north 'catching up' with the rest of the country rather than analyzing how the war in the north was implicated in the development of the rest of the country.

In this chapter, I argued that the narrative of local violence functions in the post-war period as a development narrative (Roe 1991) which does reflect reality but, rather, buttresses the assumptions that facilitate decision making and program design. It justifies the authority of peace experts who play the role of protector/trustee on behalf of an impoverished and conflict-affected population. Because of this, it does not matter how many people acknowledge the complexity of systems of violence in the region, the narrative will persist unless a similarly simplistic narrative is developed to replace it (Roe 1991). Dolan (2011) attempted to create just such an alternative narrative by arguing that the government of Uganda under Museveni has practiced a form of 'social torture' through its violence and disciplining of the north. However tempting such a narrative may be to those who are dissatisfied by the idea of exclusively local sources of violence,



the social torture narrative is similarly problematic in that it lays all of the blame on Museveni's regime. They are the only source of aggression in this narrative. From a feminist geopolitical perspective, with a focus on the everyday and the complexities of lived experience, the question is not what the right development narrative is, but how people negotiate the power/knowledge systems that support various narratives. This includes the performances of and contestations to the will to improve and the geographies of difference that buttress these narratives.

In the case of northern Uganda, I argued that the racialized war narratives discussed in the previous chapter translated into a post-war landscape in which sources of violence were spatialized as 'local'. This geography facilitated the distinction between outsider peace experts and local populations in need of support and guidance. I demonstrated how at the same time that they challenged national and international actors' claims to be benevolent protectors, local NGO workers manipulated the narrative of local violence to claim that position for themselves. In the next chapter, I deconstruct the protector/victim/aggressor triad even further by examining what happens when all three roles are embodied by individuals of the same group. To accomplish this analysis, I delve into the everyday negotiations of violence in the work of MOK, a grassroots human rights organization. Through an examination of their work and lives, I will show how, through the process of working in their own communities, families and lives, members of MOK take on all three of the triad positions. This analysis would trouble the simplistic narrative structure of protector, victim and aggressor as well as illuminate expressions of agency that at times resist oppressive power structures and at times support them.

## Chapter 6

### **Embodying the Triad: MOK and Expressions of Agency**

The narratives of local violence discussed in the previous chapters rely upon racialized, classed, and gendered distinctions between benevolent protectors, passive victims, and aggressive others. These scaled categories of difference are key components in this narrative of violence. Protectors claim legitimacy by disassociating themselves from the sites of ‘local’ violence, sites in which both victims and aggressors are embedded. As discussed in the previous chapter, even NGO workers from northern Uganda use this local narrative to separate themselves from local sources of violence by relocating the local to rural, resource poor areas.

This chapter investigates the consequences that follow when a geographic distinction cannot be used to separate those in the roles of protector, victim, and aggressor. Towards this end, I focus on the lives and work of the members of MOK because as a group they epitomize the population targeted by both military protectionism and development-style empowerment programs. Unlike the employees of the other NGOs with whom I worked, many of the members of MOK would be classified as vulnerable individuals according to contemporary INGO heuristics. They are resource poor living in a rural area, they have little if any formal education. Many are widowed, HIV-positive, caring for large numbers of orphans, and/or do not have access to land. These are the individuals for whom the peacebuilding projects are ostensibly developed and executed. Thus, an analysis of their lives and work allows me to investigate what occurs when a grassroots organization takes on the role of protector even as their identity is tied to the

very location that is associated with violence. It also highlights the challenges and opportunities for MOK to be identified as a women's organization in a location associated with aggressive masculinities.

In this chapter, I show how MOK members continuously move between the roles of protector, victim, and aggressor. I examine how violence has integrated into their lives, how they have fought it, and how they have perpetuated it. I demonstrate the similarities and differences between fighting violence within one's own life and protecting others from violence. My investigation into MOK's negotiations of violence, therefore, challenges not only the scaled categories of the triad but also the assumed distinctions between protectors, aggressors, and victims.

This examination of MOK's work through a feminist geopolitical lens accomplishes two things. First, I make the connections between interpersonal conflict and structural violence. While the narrative of local violence obscures such linkages, everyday experiences of MOK members show how it is a lived reality. Second, the paternalistic logics of protection and development implicitly disavow the rural population's agency. This study undermines such assumptions. As discussed in previous chapters, these patriarchal logics feminize populations by casting them as passive and in need of protection and guidance. During war, militaristic mindsets feminized these populations by presuming the best interests of the civilian population and implementing militarized security to achieve those needs. During the post-war period, these mindsets have persisted into the design and implementation of international and national peacebuilding programs for the region. An analysis of MOK's work unsettles the assumptions from which these programs justify their work; members of MOK do not fit

neatly into the role of passive victims, but rather they express their agency as they contest, perpetrate, and/or cope with interpersonal and structural violence.

I offer a postcolonial feminist analysis of the agency of MOK members that neither denies their free will nor dismisses the social structures that shape their lives. The concept of agency generally refers to “the power of actors to operate independently of the determining constraints of social structure” (Sharp 1999, 3). However, broad definitions such as this encourage debates regarding what counts as ‘independent’ prompting scholars such as Mahmood (2001) to argue that feminists tend to uncritically glorify expressions of agency that resist structures of dominance and oppression. She challenges feminists to “think of agency not as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but *as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create*” (Mahmood 2001, p.203, emphasis added). Mahmood thus stresses that expressions of agency need not conform to a particular set of feminist beliefs to be understood as manifestations of agency. Mahmood’s conception of agency informs this analysis in two ways. Not only does it serve the project conceptually, as I critique paternalistic and masculinist norms that deny the agency of individuals, it also cautions me not to reproduce such a dismissal from a feminist perspective.

It is not simply enough to say that all behavior is an expression of agency without examining the relationship between expressions of agency and the social structures in which they are embedded. For this reason, I turn to Menon’s (2004) discussion of free will in which she argues that free will and its manifestations as agency are actively constrained by coercion; “what appears to be free will is *produced* by the operation of structures of power that hegemonise notions of right and wrong, of common sense, and of

permissible solidarities” (p.209-2010). Menon argues that we are both free and unfree at the same time, and “the task of feminist politics, then, is both to enable the subject to act – to exercise that [free] will constrained by power structures – as well as to demonstrate that the will is truly free only when the structures that ‘frame our desire’ are exposed and dismantled” (p.210). My analysis of MOK’s negotiations of violence examines how the conditions of the post-war social landscape both constrain and enable MOK’s expressions of agency to shape social relations by defining and fighting violence. I emphasize not only their resistance to oppressive social structures, but also the ways they strategically accept and reinforce such structures. By highlighting MOK’s strategic and contested negotiations of the multiple social, cultural, economic, and political structures in their lives, including kinship networks, local manifestations of the state, and the international norms of the development industry, I show how members of MOK alternatively (and occasionally simultaneously) fulfill the roles of protector, victim, and aggressor both individually and as part of a fragmented collective.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into two sections. The first examines how the historically specific context of war, displacement, and NGO assistance contributed as well as constrained the growth of MOK as an organization. In particular, I explore how this context shaped their collective identity and authority as both a women’s group and a human rights organization. This analysis provides a foundation for the second section, which investigates the embedded agency of individual members as they experience, fight, and perpetrate violence in the context of their work as human rights advocates. For heuristic purposes, I divide this latter section into examples of MOK members playing the roles of protectors, victims, and perpetrators of violence. The simplicity of this

heuristic division, however, does not hold up to the complexities of everyday life as the same action can be interpreted in multiple ways and the same individual can embody multiple roles. These complexities disrupt the simplistic narrative of local violence and the protectorship triad discussed in earlier chapters while demonstrate the potential utility for a feminist reimagining of a protectorship triad.

### **Embedded Agency: The Creation of MOK**

MOK is different from all those other NGO women's groups you see around. MOK started by themselves, they weren't created by an NGO. They are a true expression of the strength and determination of Acholi women.

This is how Otiko, an employee of Gulu Human Rights (GHR), framed his recommendation that I meet with members of MOK. According to Otiko's origin story of MOK, the group represented something categorically different from the many women's groups started by NGOs. They were neither the passive victims of the protectionist narrative nor was the group merely the product of INGO empowerment programs. According to Otiko and the other employees of GHR, MOK represented the actions of Acholi women uncompromised by the norms and practices of INGOs. It was for this reason that the director of GHR chose to support MOK through trainings and income generating activities.

While Otiko's origin story of MOK speaks to the agency and ingenuity of the founding members of MOK, it does so by separating MOK from its surroundings. It disengages MOK from the historical context in which it is embedded. Unsurprisingly, the founding members of MOK tell a much more complicated origin story. The impetus to

organize originated as a result of their experiences in the IDP camps and the inability of either government or NGOs to fulfill their promises of protection. As Auma explained,

We saw the problems in the camps on a daily basis; the abandoned or abused children, the rape, the violence. There were so many NGOs and government programs coming through, yet none of them were able to really change things.

Because these types of violence continued despite the promises of protection, the future members of MOK decided to take action themselves. The development of the group was, therefore, an expression of agency within very specific historical and geographic contexts.

Auma, telling me her history of the group, continued,

So we decided to do it ourselves, but we knew we would need training, support. ...so we did what all of the NGOs were asking people to do, we formed a group. We formed a women's group. Almost all of the NGOs were telling people to organize in groups to receive the services and trainings they had to offer. And they especially wanted women's groups. Even the WFP [World Food Program] distributed food to women rather than the male heads of households. With all this focus on women and women's groups, we thought that the best thing to do would be to start our own women's group. We assumed that if we formed a group that these NGOs would support us since that is what they kept asking for.

In this version of MOK's origin story, agency is embedded in contextually specific social structures. The founding members of MOK identified a problem – child neglect, interpersonal violence – and sought to devise a way to fight it. The conditions of life in the camps and the unequal distribution of power between social institutions greatly shaped their approach. The upheaval caused by the mass displacement had disrupted many local, social, and cultural institutions including kinship networks and clan leadership leaving the agendas of NGOs and government programs to dominate the social organization of the region. The NGOs prioritized women's groups and collective action, thus MOK's decision to form a women's group to fight violence in this context was a

strategic expression of agency through which they intended to use existing social conditions towards their own ends.

Protective strategies enacted by the state and NGOs further facilitated MOK's formation. For example, the mass displacement caused by the government and perpetuated by the NGOs (Branch 2011) geographically concentrated this group of women facilitating their collective action. In the pre-war period, most people lived on dispersed homesteads. This impeded group organization, particularly for women whose daily responsibilities were tethered primarily to the homestead. These circumstances altered radically during the forced displacement to densely settled camps. Additionally, the preponderance of NGOs urging people to organize themselves into groups inspired the founding members of MOK to organize in such a way. Auma highlighted this point in the following portion of her story of MOK:

People were always being asked to register in groups to receive whatever the NGOs were handing out. So we did the same thing, we made a list. We went throughout the camp and invited women to join our group. We got forty-five people to join us. Some of the women didn't even know what they were signing up for, but it didn't matter. Whenever an opportunity came for people to join a group, they did. This is how people got food and services, by registering their names.

Registering people in groups was logistically convenient for NGOs responsible to large populations of displaced persons. MOK's adaptation of this practice for its own purposes can be seen as a strategic expression of agency embedded in historical contexts. From the original nine founding members, they quickly grew to 45. With this larger group, they then sought support.

Finding an NGO to provide them training in fighting violence was much more difficult than the members of MOK had anticipated. Even though the representatives of



NGOs constantly encouraged people to form groups, they wanted these groups to facilitate the NGO'S particular project. The terms were set by the NGOs. MOK, on the other hand, asked organizations to support MOK's project that addressed the pressing needs that they had identified: the everyday violence of life in the camps, including child neglect, rape, and abuse of power. Apiyo, one of the founding members of MOK, expressed her impatience with the NGOs she and other founding members of MOK had approached.

For months we would go to the meetings and trainings set up by these NGOs. We would listen to what they had to say and ask questions. We wanted help learning how to address the violence in the camps. We wanted training, education, but they kept saying no. They kept saying that they didn't have the resources available to help us. We weren't asking to be paid. We just wanted training.

MOK was not taken seriously until a few of GHR's field officers encountered MOK members at an internationally sponsored training on human rights. Whereas most NGO workers implied that MOK's ideas did not fit within their mandates, GHR representatives were eager to support uniquely Acholi initiatives. By defining MOK as an Acholi initiative of independent Acholi women, GHR strengthened its ability to claim to international funding sources that it was working with grassroots organizations. When I worked with GHR six years later, they still continued to use MOK as an indicator of their grassroots connections on grant applications. In highlighting these different versions of MOK's origin story, I show how they are both embedded in the politics and practices of NGO work in northern Uganda. Both GHR and MOK strategically mobilized their association with the other to gain legitimacy in the post-war social landscape of development programming and peacebuilding.

## **Group Identity and Individual Agency**

Over the past six years, members of MOK received a variety of trainings from multiple NGOs on such topics as human rights, HIV/AIDs counseling, land dispute management, and the psychological effects of trauma following war. Individuals within the group have take advantage of these trainings not only as tools to advocate against violence in other people's lives but also in their own. As opposed to the NGOs discussed in the previous chapter, there is no clear separation between the population to be protected and those doing the protection in the lives of MOK's members. Akidi made this point in relation to her own life and work with MOK when she said,

When I signed up for MOK, my life was falling apart. My husband had left me alone with four children. We were living in the camp and barely surviving. I was depressed – if MOK hadn't come into my life, I probably would have killed myself...but then I joined MOK and got the training and started to understand the importance of human rights. I started to understand my responsibilities to ensure the rights of my children....those trainings and the support of MOK members changed my life. I started to feel like I could do things. Now whenever there is a training, I go. Every single training is meaningful to me. I find something in every training that helps me live a better life and be a better human rights advocate.

Like Akidi, many MOK members identified a change in their lives associated with their participation in the group. They spoke of the ability to engage in a wider variety of spaces than they had experienced previously. Achiro describes the changes in her life as follows:

I am called to community meetings now. They ask for my advice as a representative of MOK. I am respected; my opinion is respected. My husband understands the importance of this work, and he helps me at home. If I get called away on MOK business, he cares for the children and prepares meals. I could never have left my home and travelled so much before MOK. But now I do. I even went to Kampala [the capital city] for a training! Being in MOK has changed my life.

MOK's growth as a group facilitated the conditions for new and different expressions of agency amongst the members. However, as mentioned above, MOK's formation and legitimacy as a group was tied to its position within hierarchies of power. For this reason, MOK members were attentive to the expectations of the variously scaled actors and organizations with which they work. They negotiate the opportunities and limitations of claiming particular identities in relation to their legitimacy in shaping social relations. By examining how they negotiate their group's identity as both a human rights organization and a women's group, I demonstrate the embedded nature of their agency.

### ***MOK as a Human Rights Organization***

Originally formed to fight interpersonal violence in their communities, the members of MOK did not identify as a human rights organization until after their training and subsequent association with GHR. They were officially positioned within the protectorship hierarchy by GHR during a human rights training for community leaders in 2006. Officially, the pretense of the training was to update all parties on human rights issues and the resources available to them. Unofficially, it provided GHR a way to show confidence in MOK; their participation in the training legitimized their stake in the community. As Sara, another member of MOK, noted:

All of the community leaders and officials were there in the same room, and so were we. We were part of the conversation. It also gave us important connections for the future. When a police officer or a soldier ignored us, we could go to their superiors because we now had a relationship with them. And if their superiors were doing something bad, we could call on GHR to hold them accountable.

At the workshop's conclusion, the chairman of GHR reminded all parties present that any human rights violations be reported to them and in doing so, reinforced the GHR's technical legal knowledge that established them as experts in the field of human rights. Subsequently, the Police District Commander highlighted the police's technical training and expertise in maintaining law and order to support human rights. Sara's observation indicates how the organization understood human rights as a power-knowledge system. While they were given a degree of authority through their training with GHR, they were often reminded of their subordinate role in the hierarchy of expert-driven human rights protection.

To sustain their new position as protectors, the members of MOK must reproduce the NGO's position as expert, cede punitive authority to state structures such as the police and the court system, and maintain popular support by reinforcing the institutions of marriage and clan leadership. MOK is not positioned to challenge these institutions – their legitimacy is staked on the willingness of the representatives of these institutions to listen to the members of MOK. It is through their position within the hierarchy of protectors, therefore, that members of MOK are able to fight violence and advocate for human rights. They are embedded in the social relations that legitimize this hierarchy and its connection to the scaled categories of protector, victim, and aggressor.

It is from this position, however, that members of MOK have crafted their own interpretation of human rights advocacy. MOK members understand human rights violations as unfulfilled responsibilities; thus, to fight human rights violations, they identify and attempt to rectify the networks of responsibility in which the parties implicated in a dispute are situated. Although they often come up with conflicting

answers to difficult questions (eg. whether one should support or leave an alcoholic husband), the process of debate and conversation make one's roles and responsibilities open to negotiation. This is an important point for understanding how their human rights advocacy is an expression of agency. Regardless of whether or not individual members of MOK support or resist hierarchical relations in their advocacy, they are all active agents in the process of interpreting human rights and negotiating relations of responsibilities.

### ***MOK as a Women's Group***

As mentioned above, there was a focus on women's rights and women's empowerment amongst the many NGOs working in the IDP camps during the war. The category 'woman' became reified as the position from which progressive change could occur, with local men relegated to the assumed position of unenlightened aggressor. Even as MOK members disagree with indiscriminate ascription of blame to rural men for violence against women, MOK relies on the popularity of women's groups amongst NGOs that has emerged from this rhetoric. They strategically maintained their identity as a women's group even as they purposefully began to add men to the organization only two years after the group's conception. As Apiyo explained,

We wanted the group to have more legitimacy; we wanted it to represent a broader range of knowledge and experiences. So we invited some elders and some youth to join us. Nine [male] elders and nine [male] youth. That plus an incorporation of other women who asked to join brought us up to about 84, where we are today.

Incorporating men into the group was an astute decision acknowledging the structures of the communities where MOK members lived and worked. Concerns had arisen that MOK

was just another women's group supported by NGOs that did not need or care about men. Furthermore, the men that joined became visible allies for the empowerment of women and spoke out publicly against violence against women and in support of MOK's work. MOK's local reputation improved with this demonstration of inclusivity even though the group was still predominantly female.

The addition of men to the group required careful management in relation to the NGOs with which MOK worked. Ocora Walter, an employee of an NGO that has given MOK members training and support to fight child labor, summed up the concerns about the group's gendered identity when he said:

We know MOK has men in it, but we still consider them a women's organization. As long as the group is predominantly female and only women are officers, then we will continue to consider them a women's group. This is important because we have many projects that are focused on supporting women's groups.

The mission of Ocora Walter's NGO to empower women is accomplished through a particular prescription which focuses on 'women' rather than gender equality. As demonstrated in this example, the members of MOK carefully navigate the different gendered expectations of their communities and the international NGOs. They construct a group identity that gives them legitimacy with differently scaled actors.

Through their creation of a women's human rights organization, the members of MOK not only demonstrated their agency, they also expanded their individual opportunities to express that agency. However, as expressions of agency are not necessarily meant to resist systems of violence and oppression (Mahmood year), it should not be assumed that the members of MOK challenge all forms of violence through their work. Rather, due to their embeddedness in systems of violence, there are ways in which

they maintain as well as challenge forms of structural violence (eg. the militarism of the state, the patriarchal family, the privileging of legal forms of justice) that produce the very types of everyday expressions of violence they seek to eliminate. To understand the complications and contradictions within MOK's anti-violence advocacy, the next section examines their multiple and simultaneous positions as protector, victim, and aggressor in more detail.

### **Embodying the Protector/Victim/Aggressor Triad**

Members of MOK regularly move between protecting others from violence, being the victim of violence themselves, and perpetrating acts of violence against others. Occasionally, one member will alternately embody the protector, the victim, and the aggressor. Sometimes it will be different members of the group who take on the different roles. What is notable, as I shall explain, is how the members of MOK use their experiences in all three positions to craft their human rights advocacy and their expressions of agency. The following analysis focuses on a category of conflict that represents a significant proportion of MOK's cases: domestic violence.

#### **Embodying the Role of Protector**

Through their role as human right advocates, members of MOK actively claim the role of protector. However, because they have neither the legal expertise of NGOs nor the judicial system nor the punitive capabilities of the police or clan leaders, the members of

MOK realize their position as protector in a different way. They function as intermediaries that advocate on the behalf of individuals whose rights have been violated. MOK's reputation for success in such advocacy precedes them, and villages beyond members' home areas began to request educational programs and mediate mediation. A combination of their mediation skills and their ability to call upon the authority and influence of other people and groups who are positioned as protectors, such as NGOs, clan leaders, and the police, bolster MOK's efforts and extend their geographic reach. When people do not receive the help and protection they desire from an individual or organization, they turn to MOK to help advocate on their behalf.

For example, a young mother came to MOK's office accompanied by her father and infant child to report a domestic assault by the husband of the young woman. When we saw her, her eye was bloodied, and her father was carrying the child because her arms, beaten so severely, could no longer lift him. She told the members of MOK present that her husband had done this multiple times in the past. The clan had spoken to him three times, but he continued the violence. Now they turned to MOK for help. MOK's secretary wrote a letter to the police explaining the case and recommending that they arrest the man and punish him for his actions. With this letter and its official MOK stamp, the woman and her father left for the police expressing confidence that they would get the support they needed.

The reputation of MOK's members in advocacy and mediation has spread beyond their home areas. They now receive requests to do educational programs and mediate cases in villages well beyond their home areas. Their reputation for success comes from a combination of their mediation skills and their ability to call upon the authority and



influence of other people and groups positioned as protectors, such as NGOs, clan leaders, and the police. When people do not receive the help and protection they desire from one of these organizations, they turn to MOK to help advocate on their behalf. This is a key aspect of MOK's role in processes of protection.

Anyone going to the police with MOK representation knows that their case would be addressed and they will not be asked for any 'extra' fees. This assurance is the legacy of MOK's work. In 2008, members of MOK provided evidence of corruption on the part of a police chief which resulted in his losing his position. Since then, individuals with MOK representation are treated with care. In the case of the young woman's abuse, the clear evidence of physical violence and long history of abuse prompted the husband's arrest. The woman's family nursed her back to health and then her uncle supplied her land to cultivate. With MOK acting as an intermediary, the woman, her family, and the police helped protect a victim of violence. The members of MOK involved in this case demonstrate that they had enough social position to pressure the police to take action on behalf of the young woman. Their opinions and position are respected.

In another case of domestic violence, MOK members used different tactics to protect and provide for a young woman and her child. The case came to MOK at the end of a three hour long meeting. The chairperson informed the twenty-seven members seated in the shade of a mango tree that a woman named Akura was waiting to speak to them. Heads turned towards a young woman, barely twenty, holding a small baby in her arms. The woman fidgeted with the child for a moment. She spoke in a quiet voice, giving background to her situation and then saying:

My mother-in-law started beating me. One day she beat me into a coma and because my husband was also violent, I ran away to my father's home. But my step-mother refused to let me return to my family home and my father didn't stand up for me. I was on my own and pregnant. I had to beg for food. I tried going to the police, but my husband's brother was a police officer and so no one there would help me. I tried going to the LC's, but they were in favor of my husband's family.

The individuals and institutions to which MOK typically turned in cases of domestic violence were themselves implicated in the violence. Akura's social networks, including her family and her husband's family, the police, and the local governmental administrators had all refused to help her. Akura's situation had become desperate. She continued her presentation to MOK as follows:

Akura: The only people who had helped me during her pregnancy were Odong Samuel [an MOK member] and his wife. They gave me food and helped me with the birth. They are the ones who brought me here today, to come speak to you, mon MOK (women of MOK). So here I am, with nowhere to go and no way to care for my child. Also, my husband still follows me. He finds me on the road and beats me. He threatens to burn me and my people. I am scared, please help me.

Auma: How do you want MOK to help you? What would support look like to you?

Akura: I want to be free of my husband. I want my child and I to be safe, to not fear him all of the time.

Auma (to the rest of the group): This is a case of life and death. We need to help Akura be free from her husband and able to provide for her child. It is her right to live free of such fear and to be able to fulfill her responsibilities.

The creative mechanisms by which MOK members tried to help this woman find alternative ways to secure her safety were palpable, techniques that arose from MOK's assessment of the relations of responsibility in which Akura was embedded. They discussed her multiple positions as a wife, a daughter-in-law, a daughter, a mother, a citizen, and a client of MOK, searching for ways that they could protect Akura from her

husband and his family while also ensuring that she had access to land and other forms of support that would allow her to provide for herself and her child.

Positioned between multiple institutions established to maintain social norms (eg. the police, the clan, court system, and NGOs), MOK retains a flexibility to invoke the social norms of these institutions as they best suit the case at hand. This form of strategic agency must be employed carefully. They fear that frequent challenges to social institutions could cost them their respectability and with it their social capital. Drawing on the example of domestic discord, one member said, “If we recommended separation as often as we think it is necessary, people would get upset with us, say we were breaking up homes, say that we were just crazy old women and then no one would listen to us.” Thus their respected position as mediators of personal, familial, and community level decision making and conflict resolution is tenuous. Generally maintaining the status quo gives them the space to speak out against extreme cases of abuse.

In Akura’s case, MOK circumvented police and government agencies and instead found their solution in the traditional marriage agreement within the clan that enables the dissolution of a marriage if the bride’s family returns the bride price. Members of MOK shamed Akura’s father into fulfilling his responsibility to protect his daughter’s rights. Through these means, MOK members facilitated the return of the bride-price and the subsequent freedom of the young woman. For MOK, supportive networks with interlaced relations of responsibility are a key characteristic of their human rights advocacy and the social relations they are trying to create. The members of MOK are skilled in manipulating social norms to achieve relations of responsibilities that produce better outcomes for victims of violence. Indeed, a month later MOK members felt a sense of

accomplishment with this case. Akura and her child had established themselves on a piece of her family's land and her ex-husband was in jail due to the harassment.<sup>5</sup> Although they did not know how long he would be incarcerated, Akura was safe for the moment.

Despite this outcome, my analysis cannot ignore the multiple social institutions that MOK did not challenge, and in fact left intact, that both support and perpetuate domestic violence. Patriarchal family structures, economic inequality, and distribution of resources via the state (especially access to land) all contributed to unequal power relations that manifest in violence against women. The advocacy of MOK's members is strategic, they take on the sources of violence they feel they will have the most success addressing. Their performance in the role of protector, therefore, is constrained by how they are located within complex social relations.

As mentioned above, the members of MOK are different from the employees of other NGOs in this study because they seek to address violence that affects their own lives as well as the lives of their clients. This implies that even as the members of MOK embody the role of protector in their human rights advocacy, they are also vulnerable to experiencing violence in the role of a victim. The next section explores how the members of MOK experience this aspect of the protectorship triad.

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<sup>5</sup> As in this case, clan leaders can recommend that individuals be put in jail for their own and others' safety and the police will often oblige them. YOU NEED MORE HERE—what changed the clans mind?

## **Embodying the Role of Victim**

Members of MOK are subject to many of the same structural and interpersonal violences as the men and women who come to them for help. They face corruption, lack of social services, and economic disenfranchisement on a regular basis. Many of the widowed women had to fight for access to land, and not all of them were successful. Their childhood stories speak of abuse, early marriage, denial of education, experiences that inspire their efforts to fight violence. For many of the members of MOK, these experiences persist into their adult life, as is evident from the following account of one MOK member's experience of domestic violence.

By the time Abitimo's brother brought her to the village center, there was already a small gathering of MOK members waiting for her. They helped her climb off her brother's motorcycle to sit in the shade of a store's veranda. Abitimo's face was badly swollen and bruised. Her hand softly placed on her side, she gently protected what one could only imagine were broken ribs. While people organized around her, she sat quietly, her eyes coming in and out of focus. The brother left to arrange a place for Abitimo's teenage daughter to stay, who, because of approaching school exams, could not leave to accompany her mother. Six MOK members sat quietly to the side as the secretary came over to take Abitimo's statement. Everyone was very focused and professional. Abitimo began speaking in a slow and halting voice:

He [her husband] was screaming at me. Saying I was seeing another man. [pause] He had heard it in the village, people saying I didn't need him anymore. Then he started beating me. He punched me, he hit me. [pause] I was screaming for him to stop. I told him it was not true, but he didn't listen. [pause] He dragged me by the hair into the kitchen and started pounding my head into the ground. Everything went black. [pause] When I woke up, I was alone.

The secretary probed Abitimo for more details about the incident and read her the statement to confirm it was correct before taking photographs of Abitimo's wounds for evidence. When the brother returned, all agreed that he would take Abitimo to her parents' home, approximately an hour away. From there she would see a doctor and be cared for. MOK promised to send representatives in a couple of days to check on her. As Abitimo and her brother drove off, the small contingent of MOK members watched them disappear into the horizon as their professional expressions melted into tears.

Over the next couple of weeks, MOK members visited Abitimo and brought back updates to the other members on her improving health. They also carried messages back and forth between Abitimo and her husband. Abitimo's family was adamant that she not return to her husband, but Abitimo felt otherwise. After having endured a month of being treated like a housegirl in her parent's and brother's home - being told to do chores and care for children that were not her own - Abitimo decided that it would be better to return to her husband's home where at least she received the respect of a grown woman in charge of her own family. Following her request, a small delegation of MOK members approached Abitimo's family on her husband's behalf. They negotiated a return in which her husband would pay all of the medical costs the family had incurred and MOK members would monitor his behavior on a regular basis. Reluctantly, Abitimo's family agreed and she was allowed to return to her husband. Abitimo's decision to return to her husband was an expression of agency; she examined her options and weighed difficult circumstances to decide where she could best approach meeting her emotional needs.

In another case when an MOK member was hospitalized after a beating by her husband, she stayed with her brother's family in Gulu town to try to make a life for herself there. MOK members also supported this woman's decision, offering support for her expression of agency. However, following Menon's (2004) interpretation of free will, the agency of these women is not unfettered. The woman who stayed in town had to leave behind her children, even though she knew her husband would neglect them. As their father, her husband invoked his customary claim to the children, willfully holding on to them as punishment for her departure. In Abitimo's case, she could see no way of making a life for herself independent of the constraints of her brother's family or her husband. She had no money and no access to land without them, so she had to choose between these two limited options. In both cases, their choices illustrates no simple expressions of free will, but rather, the complex negotiations of power, security, and responsibility that characterize the lives of victims of domestic violence.

Episodes of domestic violence involving members of MOK raise further complications regarding the role of MOK members in the protectorship triad. The injury is doubly felt as their friend's pain damages MOK's collective spirit. They take pride in having learned how to mitigate violence in their own homes; it is part of what gives them confidence when mediating other people's conflicts. Unlike professional NGOs which focus on target populations of which their employees remained distanced, MOK members are members of the community in which they work. Their actions are closely scrutinized and any perceived hypocrisy is quickly called out.

Between the summers of 2010 and 2011, three MOK members were beaten to the point of hospitalization. In each case, the husband accused the wife of cheating. This rash

of incidents prompted a discussion at a group meeting. The debate was heated. One female member, a former military officer, took the accusations against the victims seriously and stated:

We cannot afford to have women with low moral standards in MOK. We must maintain a certain level of respect in order to do our work. I suggest we take these accusations seriously and preempt any further violence by bringing women to the police who are thought to be cheating.

Prioritization of group's reputation over the safety and welfare of individuals justifies this example of victim-blaming. While this position is consistent with MOK's prioritization of a patriarchal moral code, this perspective did not gain much support, and instead was critiqued for its extremism. Members pointed out the lack of provocation for the attacks, the need to fight violence of all kinds, and problems of alcoholism in the general population. The language of human rights was invoked to justify more advocacy against domestic violence. One of the male elders spoke up to say:

Conflicts between couples are normal. It is part of life. But fights where a woman must go to the hospital, that is not acceptable. That is a violation of human rights. These men are not fulfilling their responsibility to protect their wives. If they have a problem with their wives, they should bring it to the family, to the council of elders. That is the responsible thing to do.

The critique here is not one of hierarchical family relations. In fact, it reifies the male as the head of household with the responsibility to protect his family. However, it focuses attention on the abuser and his failure to fulfill his role as protector. Modestly but strategically, the elder draws attention away from the victim and towards the perpetrator of abuse. Abitimo's case and the discussions around it make apparent the constant negotiations of the protectorship triad that occur within MOK's membership.



While MOK's goal is to work within social structures to create a less violent situation, sometimes it is unclear which actions constitute fighting violence and which are actually producing it. For this reason I now turn to a discussion of MOK members' roles in perpetrating violence.

### **Embodying the Role of Aggressor**

In examining how members of MOK embody the role of aggressor, I am not implying that they perpetrate physical violence upon other individuals. While this may have occurred in the course of their lives, as some members served in the military and others were abducted by the LRA, it is not part of their lives as human rights advocates. However, members do perpetuate violence in other forms. For the sake of consistency, I retain the term 'aggressor' to refer to those who perpetrate violence but I am not using it here as it is generally used in the narrative of local violence. In the following discussion of MOK's role as perpetrator of violence, I will show how they perpetuate structural violence and push people into situations that maintain or increase their vulnerability to violence. In so doing, they perpetrate acts of violence through their role as protector.

I enter into a discussion of MOK's aggressor role in domestic violence by returning to Akura's case, beginning with how she came to know of MOK :

When I first came to MOK, I did not know what it was. My husband brought me here because of tensions in our home. MOK counseled me to go back to my husband. I did not want to, but I did. MOK came and checked on us, making sure there was enough food in the home and that everything was ok. And it was, for a time.

Clearly, circumstances at her home soon turned violent and she barely escaped with her life. Why, then, had MOK members recommended that Akura return to her husband's home when the possibility of abuse was imminent? Why would they tell her to stay in a situation that produced her as vulnerable to violence by both her husband and her mother-in-law?

In Akura's case, like so many others, MOK's first attempt at mitigating domestic violence is mediation. The goal of such mediations is to stabilize the family structure, to make sure everyone knows their role and is fulfilling it without violence. While I do not have access to the record of Akura's first mediation with MOK, how they have handled other cases becomes informative. For this reason, I turn to a typical mediation, one between Ajok Mary and her husband Onen Patrick.

Looking between his wife and the three MOK members facilitating the mediation, Onen Patrick laid out his concerns as follows:

My wife does not respect me. She does not get along with my people, and she does not listen to me when I tell her to stop drinking alcohol. Instead, she runs away to her family's land and takes the children with her. I have paid the children's school fees in our home village, but she takes them away and they don't go to school. Also, she has sold food stuffs from our home to pay for her alcohol, leaving us with nothing to eat. I don't like conflict in our home; I want our marriage to work, but I don't know how if she continues like this.

When he finished, Onen Patrick received confirmation and support from his brother. Ajok Mary, his wife, however, never once looked at her husband. Instead, she sat facing her father in a manner that appeared to invoke his protection. When an MOK member asked her to state her case, she continued facing her father while she spoke against her husband.

It is a lie. I don't drink. The problem is him. He is violent and beats me. And my mother-in-law does not accept my food. She accepts the food from all the other wives, but not mine. I ran away this time because my husband threatened to burn the house with me inside. My father and I reported this to the LC1 [local administrator] and we were going to take it to the sub-county police when we got called to this meeting. I don't know why I am here being accused of these things when he is at fault.

The MOK members listened to these statements along with the statements of family members and neighbors. Her drunkenness was confirmed, as was his violent behavior. In the questions and clarifications that MOK members asked, multiple rights violations were articulated. The husband's right to food, to his property, and to his children were violated. The wife's right to not be beaten was violated. The children's right to an education was violated. A simple frame of innocence or guilt would not provide the nuance necessary to address these multiple, and at times contradictory, rights claims. MOK's advice traced a network of culpability that went beyond the two individuals at the center of the dispute. Anena Teresa, the MOK member chairing the meeting, started with the wife's father. She said:

You are responsible for your daughter's problems because you keep letting her come home without investigating the problems. When she escapes to your home, you should give her a few days to recover and then go sit down with her husband's family to figure out what is happening and how to address it. Instead, you are encouraging her to run away by neither holding her responsible for her actions nor protecting her within her married home.

Anena Teresa then turned to Onen's brother and asked him to relate the following message to his mother:

She is culpable in this domestic dispute because it is happening in her homestead. As the mother in the homestead, she is responsible for making the homestead united. And when she refuses to take her daughter-in-law's food, she is being rude and divisive.

By starting their recommendations with the extended family of the couple, the MOK mediators invoked a network of social relations that could be held responsible for mitigating Onen Patrick's violent behavior and Ajok Mary's apparent irresponsibility. The husband was chastised for his own drinking; the mediation brought forth examples of how his habit exacerbated his violence and was something he could be held accountable for. The wife was also admonished for her drinking, and told that it demonstrated her lack of care and responsibility for her children and home. Neither was absolved of responsibility nor held fully responsible for their situation, and MOK members told Ajok Mary to go back to her husband. She and her father protested, but her father finally agreed to send her back on a trial basis. Throughout this discussion, Ajok Mary just kept shaking her head as an occasional tear dropped from her eyes.

Ajok Mary was not the first young woman I had seen pressured to return to a violent domestic situation by members of MOK. MOK's approach to rights and responsibilities implicitly promotes patriarchal norms of obedience and submission. Women are expected to obey their husbands and fulfill their responsibilities as mothers, wives, and daughters-in-law on their marital homestead. MOK members broach issues of domestic violence by holding everyone accountable for their roles within the family. They put faith in the family structure; if everyone plays their role in the family correctly, there would not be violence, or at least, no excuse for violence. This approach strategically enables the woman and her family to take part in the discussion, and in many cases makes it easier for a woman to eventually return to her parental homestead after proving that she had done everything possible.

Nevertheless, I query the amount of victim-blaming produced through this technique which is often exacerbated by the manner in which members of MOK compare the responsibility of different family members. The assessed irresponsibility of women is often put on par with the abuse of their husbands and family members. Thus MOK admonishes everyone to change their ways and behave more responsibly but rarely if ever critiques the hierarchical family structure and the subsequent imbalances of power within the family. In so doing, they contribute to situations where young women are forced to remain in vulnerable situations for the sake of the family. They play the role of aggressor by directing women to return to violent situations.

Furthermore, MOK's collective position on the family is inconsistent with the life choices of some of the more active members of MOK. Some have found ways to leave their husbands and live independently. A few had officially divorced their husbands, others had found ways to buy their own land and live independently once their husbands' left them for new wives. After a mediation in which a young couple was encouraged to stay together, I overheard Abolo, an MOK member with her own land, say that she could no longer live on a man's land. She would not be able to live by his rules. When I asked her why she did not encourage the young wife, or almost any of the victims of domestic violence I had met, to leave, Abolo stated that the young people did not know what perseverance was. She said:

Life in the camps was so different. People were always moving around, always finding new wives and husbands. These young men and women today, they need to learn how to have a real relationship, to commit and follow through on their responsibilities.

With the long term goal of rebuilding the social fabric of their communities, Abolo and other MOK members seek to discipline young men and women into behaving according to social norms. Although these actions reassert the status quo, they are expressions of agency. MOK members, in many cases, choose to protect the family structure (and by extension children), at the expense of possible further violence against the woman. Such expressions of agency should be understood as constrained by the oppressive social conditions that normalize unequal and unjust power relations (Menon 2004). As in this case, the social norms implicit in defining ‘appropriate’ behavior are rarely questioned as members of MOK focus on addressing the events of physical violence that erupt out of such socially acceptable behavior. Thus, any one particular action can be understood as either protection or aggression depending on one’s perspective and priorities. Understanding the negotiations behind protective actions is thus necessary to assess its successes and failures, the ways in which it supports and challenges systems of violence.

### **Conclusion**

The narrative of local violence, with its gendered and racialized assumptions, combine with the protectorship triad attributes violence in rural northern Uganda to the prevalence of aggressive masculinities that victimize unprotected female populations. The above discussion shows how MOK’s work troubles both this scaled narrative of violence and the associated discrete categories of the triad by showing how all three positions can be embodied by the same individual. While violence may manifest in

interpersonal conflicts, its roots are planted in patriarchal structures and systems of inequality that affect family structures, access to land, and distribution of resources locally, nationally, and internationally. Furthermore, while performances of masculinity during the war may have prioritized militaristic behavior, this chapter has shown how violences of patriarchal structures can be fought and yet also buttressed by those fighting violence against women.

In focusing on the agency of rural women (and men) in northern Uganda, this chapter has challenged the simplistic narrative of violence that portray them as a passive population in need of protection and/or improvement. However, a postcolonial examination of agency in a marginalized population does not assume that expressions of agency will necessarily resist oppressive structures and social relations. In this case, I used an analysis of MOK's approach to domestic violence to show how their work can simultaneously fight abuse as well as indirectly perpetuate the patriarchal social structures that make such abuse viable. I offered a discussion of their organizational history in order to put their complicated actions in perspective. The heightened attention by NGOs to grassroots organization, women's empowerment, and local peacebuilding initiatives helped MOK members build a platform from which to speak out against the violences they saw in their communities and in their own lives. They received training on human rights, mediation, and a variety of other special topics. They acquired the support of a well known NGOs in the region. Nevertheless, their newfound authority requires they uphold the authority of NGOs, the police, the court systems, and patriarchal hierarchies of power.

Examining the domestic violence advocacy of MOK members lays bare the contradictions of this situation. In trying to stop acts of violence, they occasionally support the very structures that originally facilitated the violence. Furthermore, because members work from within their own communities, those conditions of violence affect their own lives and make them vulnerable to multiple forms of aggression. They move between the roles of protector, victim, and aggressor. While they embrace the active role of the protector, they do not dismiss the role of victim. There are times when this role is useful; it can engender support from those who have a responsibility to protect and support. The key to the deployment of the victim role by the members of MOK is that it is always partial. One can be the victim of violence and yet still have the responsibilities to protect and support others, as is often the case for victims of domestic violence with children. How members of MOK negotiate the line between victim and responsible agent has the potential to make visible the 'aggressor' imbedded in their practices of protection. I do not use this insight to argue protection should not be practiced if it does not address all sources of violence. Rather, there is a utility within the flexibility and messiness of the protectorship triad, as evidenced in the lives and work of MOK members. Thus the problem is not the existence of the protectorship triad but particular spatialities of the triad that perpetuate hierarchical and oppressive social relations.



## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

Persons who need care or other forms of social support ought not to be forced into a position of subordination and obedience in relation to those who provide care and support; not only should they retain the rights of full citizens to choose their own way of life and hold authorities accountable but also they ought to be able to criticize the way in which support comes to them.

-Iris Marion Young (2003, 21)

By using a feminist geopolitical lens to interrogate the narrative of local violence, this dissertation disrupts the scaled categories of protector, victim, and aggressor associated with military and development interventions in northern Uganda. In so doing, this analysis provides a geographic contribution to feminist critiques of paternalistic support (Narayan 1997; Sevenhuijsen 1998; Hirschmann 2002; Young 2003). It examines the racialized and gendered geographies of difference invoked to sustain paternalistic and hierarchical relations of protection. By querying the multiple and varied definitions of security and protection, I simultaneously challenged the assumed benevolence of those in the role of protector and the assumed passivity of those in need of protection.

To construct my feminist geopolitical analytic, I brought together feminist theories of war, critical development studies, and feminist postcolonial critiques of Western interventions. Together, these theories provided the analytic tools to interrogate the complex and contradictory power relations associated with the protectorship triad. Empirically, I employed a feminist methodology that was attentive to power relations and issues of representation in and through the research process. I used a combination of ethnographic observation, semi-structured interviews and secondary document analysis to

address the research questions driving this dissertation. These questions interrogated the relationship between war and post-war narratives of violence and the role of these narratives on the design of security and development interventions. In particular, this dissertation employed a feminist lens to ask how gender regimes were implicated in the promotion of various narratives of violence and the subsequent design of interventions to address said violence. Finally, this dissertation asked how a focus on lived experience can inform an understanding of how systems of violence transverse the war/post-war transition. The answers to these questions not only challenge mainstream assumptions of the narrative of local violence, they also illuminate alternative spatialities of the protectorship triad which create the potential for a feminist praxis of protection.

### **Findings and Implications**

This section summarizes the major findings and implications of this dissertation. For organizational purposes, I divide my discussion of the protectorship triad in post-war northern Uganda into the following three interconnected themes: (1) narratives of local violence: scaling the protectorship triad, (2) total interventions and the protectorship triad, and (3) a feminist reimagining of the protectorship triad.

#### **Narratives of Local Violence: Scaling the Protectorship Triad**

In feminist theories of war and violence, analytics employing variations on the protectorship triad are often to explain and critique militaristic narratives of violence (Cooke 1996; Puar and Rai 2002; Young 2003; Enloe 2007). This dissertation advances

feminist engagements with the protectorship triad by examining it spatially. I argue that national and international actors perpetuated a narrative of local violence in which the victim and aggressor roles of the protectorship triad are scaled as local while the protector role can be scaled as national, international, or any other scale that is separate from the local. This scalar narrative was useful to the government as it separated the population of northern Uganda from the rest of the nation-state while simultaneously providing a justification for the government's militaristic interventions in the region.

I disrupt this narrative and the scaled categories of the triad it produces by employing feminist and critical geographic theories of scales in which scales are not discrete entities by relational social constructs (Marston 2000; Brenner 2001; Herod and Wright 2002). Viewing the triad through this spatial lens denaturalizes the assumed separation of the protector from the site of the victim and aggressor. Rather, this analysis demonstrates how the scalar separation of these categories is implicated in efforts to solidify hierarchical and paternalistic social relations. In particular, I show how racialized and gendered geographies of difference were invoked to sustain this scaled narrative of violence. I trace a national narrative of northern violence based upon the construction of an aggressive masculine other. Using a racialized rhetoric of a bellicose Acholi masculinity, the national narrative depicted all Acholi men as always already a potential threat. However, drawing upon Dolan's (2002) argument of collapsing masculinities during war, I demonstrate that the state-based promotion of a hegemonic militaristic masculinity reduced the opportunities for civilians to perform non-militaristic masculinities. Increased violence amongst the civilian population, therefore, was a result

of the war not a cause of it. The distinction between protector and aggressor is thus blurred.

My research contributes to critiques of the security state in Uganda (Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative 2001; Mwenda 2010; Dolan 2011) by demonstrating how the othering of northern Uganda decreased the security of people living in the region at the same time that military interventions were supposedly sent for their protection. This was true throughout Acholiland, but most intensely for the people of Kony's home town, Odek. This decrease in security was accomplished through harassment by military and lay people alike that limited the mobility of people scaled as 'local' in the narrative of local violence. This scaling and harassment was accomplished through racialized narratives that reinforced the long-standing idea that northerners were primitive, violence, and not part of the modern nation-state. By demonstrating how paternalistic definitions of security actually lead to an increase in the experiences of insecurity by those supposedly being protected, this project contributes to feminist geopolitical studies that query the discourses and practices of security to highlight their political nature (de Alwis and Hyndman 2002; Kleinfeld 2007; Fluri 2011a).

The inconsistencies within the scaled narrative of violence do not diminish its power. This discursive frame for the war in northern Uganda was geopolitically useful to the Government of Uganda in both disciplining the northern population and building alliances with other governments, especially that of the United States of America. By constructing the northern population as a threat to the nation, the Government of Uganda justified increased militarization and reinforced its position in the role of protector. In so doing, it normalized the violences of militarism, paternalism, and state-sanctioned

political and economic disenfranchisement of the north while vilifying interpersonal and anti-state expressions of aggression within the northern population. This disconnection between types of violence is the defining characteristic of scalar narratives of violence. If systems of violence are examined in their entirety, the distinct scalar categories of protector, victim, and aggressor could not be maintained.

### **Total Interventions and the Protectorship Triad**

The idea that it is not possible to have security without development nor development without security has become a rallying cry for the contemporary international interventionist agenda (Boutros-Ghali 1992; United Nations 2004; World Bank 2011); it justifies a wide range of interventions ranging from military to economic to political to social. Post-war development programming, therefore, is designed to promote peacebuilding and non-violence conflict resolution as a means of fostering the conditions necessary for development. As Zoellick, President of the World Bank, says,

This is about *Securing Development* – bringing security and development together first to smooth the transition from conflict to peace and then to embed stability so that development can take hold over a decade and beyond. Only by securing development can we put down roots deep enough to break the cycle of fragility and violence. (2008)

In querying the effect of securing development in the context of a scaled narrative of violence, I have made three findings. The first finding is a notable lack of post-war peacebuilding projects targeting national and international actors. There are no substantial projects of justice and reconciliation that engage with the structural inequalities developed before and during the two decades of active warfare - structural

inequalities that continue to isolate northern Uganda from economic and political systems of power. Those efforts that do exist to create a national dialogue have not met with political support. The Refugee Law Project, for example, drafted a national reconciliation bill which was sent to parliament almost ten years ago. To date the bill is still idle in parliament and has never been discussed. Additionally, as one UN official said following the 2011 general elections, there has been a disappointing lack of any presidential candidate taking the election campaign as an opportunity to make a new social contract with the north. Instead, he lamented, it is business as usual. The national narrative of the war as a ‘northern issue’ allows the post-war narrative to focus on the north ‘catching up’ with the rest of the country rather than analyzing how the war in the north is implicated in the development of the rest of the country. As Dolan (2011) and Mwenda (2010) have both argued, war-based militarization has been a lucrative project for the state and has reduced the incentive for the government to end the war. Reducing state militarization is not part of the post-war peacebuilding program based upon the scaled narrative of the war that locates the causes and consequences of conflict in northern Uganda.

The second finding of this query demonstrates that even as a narrative is being promoted that isolates local forms of violence, the very structure of peacebuilding programming strengthen particular types of multi-scalar relationships. As I discussed in Chapter 5, the establishment of ‘peace experts’ in the development-style institutions of peacebuilding allows professional local NGO workers to enter into alliances built through multi-scalar negotiations of paternalistic protection. Local NGO workers gain authority by aligning themselves with international trends and distancing themselves from the resource poor, rural populations that are the focus of peacebuilding improvement

programs in the region. The post-war focus on domestic violence, women's empowerment, and the critique of a violent Acholi masculinity thereby becomes a means by which gendered authority is negotiated and masculinist relations are perpetuated across scale.

I have striven to make this critique while appreciating the significant gains of recent advocacy around sexual and gender based violence in the post-war context. These gains are the result of generations of activists who have worked for the mainstreaming of gender perspectives in development programming and those who have pushed for legislation such as the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 that reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts. There is no question that addressing sexual and gender based violence is essential to fighting systems of violence. However, in this dissertation I argue that when combined with scaled narratives of a violent masculinity, such advocacy has the potential to discursively *isolate* rather than *connect* domestic violence to other forms of violence.

The final finding reveals the persistence of the victim/aggressor distinction within development programming. As opposed to the binary of trustee/population to be improved found in other development contexts (Li 2007), the post-war context perpetuates the militaristic distinction between protector, victim, and aggressor. This distinction is necessary to understand how development-style improvement programs are designed for a 'conflict-prone' population. In the scaled narrative of local violence prevalent in northern Uganda, the potential victims and aggressors of violence are both part of the local population. Post-war peacebuilding therefore includes both empowerment programs designed for the victims and conflict management skills for the

aggressors. Given the gendering of the narrative of violence, empowerment programs are designed predominantly for women with a focus on women's rights and sexual and gender based violence. Non-violence conflict resolution trainings, on the other hand, are aimed at men. Thus peacebuilding programs continue the racialized and gendered narratives of the war, including the protectorship triad, into post-war development programming.

### **A Feminist Reimagining of the Protectorship Triad**

The narrative of local violence promotes strict scalar separation between the categories of protector, victim, and aggressor. This separation is realized via racialized and gendered geographies of difference that essentialize identity and present particular groups as always already protectors, victims, or aggressors. By offering a feminist geopolitical analysis of the triad, I not only denaturalize the assumed solidity of this scalar relationship, I also highlight the multiple spatialities and embodiments that can exist within the triad. Through the analysis of a resource poor, rural women's organization's use of the protectorship triad, I argue for its potential utility within a feminist praxis.

For the members of Mon Odek pi Kuc (MOK), there is no scalar separation between the roles of protector, victim, and aggressor. Through their work as human rights advocates embedded in complex social hierarchies and systems of violence, members of MOK have the potential to embody all three of the triad's roles. They take on the active role of protector when advocating for others whose rights have been violated. Through



this role, their individual lives in both the public and private realm have shifted. People in their communities invite them to speak and share opinions at meetings and official events. At home, they employ their mediation skills and human rights knowledge to mitigate conflict and protect their own rights. Thus, in bringing their knowledge as protectors into their own lives, they seek to reduce their potential to become victims.

Despite all attempts to avoid becoming the victims of violence, the members of MOK do not dismiss the utility of the role of victim. When violence is identified, being in the victim role can encourage action by those who have a responsibility to protect and support. The key to the deployment of the victim role by the members of MOK is that it is and must always be partial. One can be the victim of violence and yet still have the responsibilities to protect and support others, as is often the case for victims of domestic violence with children. Additionally, the role of victim is not tied to particular identities. While vulnerability to violence is unevenly distributed throughout society, this does not mean that certain individuals or groups are inherently victims (Narayan 1997; Mohanty 2003). Claiming the victim status, as opposed to having it imposed, can contribute to a feminist praxis as it highlights the uneven effects of violence and oppression.

Throughout this dissertation, I trouble the assumed benevolence of those in the role of protector. The separation of those in the role of the protector and aggressor is necessary in the scaled construction of the triad, but this separation is often blurred when viewed from the perspective of victims. Protective actions on the part of the Government of Uganda, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as the members of MOK all have the potential to be interpreted and experienced as aggression. Security needs are defined according to the perspective of the protector; this can lead not only to the neglect

of security concerns as defined by victims of violence but also to the creation of new threats to peace and security as was evident in the Government of Uganda's creation of 'protected villages' during the war.

A feminist reimagining of the protectionist triad disrupts the static scalar distribution of roles associated with the narrative of local violence. In its place, it offers a remapping of the triad that is attentive to the multiple spatialities and embodiments of the triad realized through everyday negotiations of violence. No form of protection will ever address all vulnerabilities produced by systems of violence; yet this does not preclude practices of protection from contributing to a feminist praxis. Based on my analysis of the post-war landscape in northern Uganda, I argue that the protectorship triad can be useful in holding actors accountable for their role in perpetuating systems of violence as well as their responsibilities to fight said violence. However, this is only effective from a feminist perspective when the hierarchy, paternalism, and practices of othering are removed from the protectorship triad.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

As mentioned in the discussion of methods in Chapter 3, ethnographic research is, by its very nature, limited by its generalizability. It prioritizes depth over breadth of information, thereby limiting the types of questions that can be asked and claims that can be made. The difficulty in replicating results, due to the importance of individual experience and interpretation in the process, is also a limitation. However, as discussed previously, these limitations are countered by the depth of the data produced and the

thick description afforded by the use of ethnographic methods. Through my ethnographic research, I excavated situated knowledge that countered the universalist claims of international discourses and provided alternative understandings of violence and complex social relations. Future research could augment the analyses of this dissertation by examining the priorities and practices of differently situated individuals and organizations in northern Uganda.

In addition, there are three specific projects for future research that I will explore in more detail here. First, my research in northern Uganda brought my attention to the violent land conflicts that characterize the post-war landscape. These land conflicts have become ubiquitous during the resettlement processes and are colloquially referred to as the ‘new war’ in Acholiland. These conflicts range from disputes between individuals, between ethnic groups, and between multi-national corporations and local residents. I am interested in how these conflicts, together with the tensions between customary and freehold land tenure, support and challenge existing gender regimes. Given the relevance of access to land to issues of both security and development, a study of post-war land conflicts provides another lens into the study of the security-development nexus.

Second, given the degree to which President Museveni invoked a racialized rhetoric of the Acholi as a martial race to justify political and economical disenfranchisement of northern Uganda, research into future electoral politics could expose how such rhetoric continues or is challenged by future regimes. Shifts in national politics when President Museveni eventually leaves power have the potential to change the north’s relationship to the rest of the country. Building upon my ethnographic engagement with northern Uganda, a future research project on this topic would focus on

the lived experiences of people in northern Uganda and how a regime change does or does not impact their lives.

Finally, because the narrative of local violence and the scaled protectorship triad is embedded in global processes of militarization and development, future research can further inform an understanding of the triad through a multi-sited, transnational analysis. The goal of such research would be to create a counter-topography (Katz 2001) of the protectorship triad. By troubling conceptions of scale and exploring the relations between local and global processes, such a transnational project would provide a more comprehensive feminist geopolitical reading of the triad as it functions at various locations around the world.

### **Conclusion**

The distinction between the benevolent protector, the victimized population, and the masculine aggressor is particularly poignant in relation to Africa. It is built upon the legacies of colonial international imaginaries that view Africa as caught in a trap of violence and underdevelopment that it cannot escape without external assistance. It is unsurprising, therefore, that interventionist peacebuilding has occurred during the era of so-called 'new wars' in which violent conflicts are understood to be predominantly intra-state affairs in developing countries. International discourses of development and modernity are intertwined with understandings of war and peace in these contexts.

Through my analysis of the post-war landscape in northern Uganda, I show that international actors are not the only ones promoting the narrative of local violence and

the subsequent scaling of the protectorship triad. The post-colonial state as well as local elites (re)appropriate the narrative to elevate their own position within the hierarchical relations of the scaled protectorship triad. Thus, this dissertation examined the negotiations of power and position between multiple actors vying for the role of protectors to disrupt the racialized and gendered geographies of difference that buttress narratives of local violence. However, by employing a feminist geopolitical lens, this dissertation went further by examining everyday negotiations of violence amongst actors - untraditional geopolitical actors. Through this work, I mapped alternative spatialities of the protectorship triad that disrupt the narrative of local violence while still maintaining the utility of the triad in addressing systems of violence from a feminist perspective.

Ultimately, this dissertation offers a feminist geopolitical analysis of the narrative of local violence and the protectorship triad by examining how identities are produced, politicized, and manipulated in relation to projects intended to bring peace and development to a particular region. By using the lens of everyday experiences, this dissertation contributes not only to the identification of the oppressive potential of the protectorship triad but also the opportunities it provides for alternative strategies to fight violence and oppression.

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## CURRICULUM VITA

Nicole Laliberté

### EDUCATION

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Doctor of Philosophy in Geography and Women's Studies  
The Pennsylvania State University, Defended March 29, 2013  
Masters of Science in Geography  
The Pennsylvania State University, 2008  
Bachelor of Arts in Arts and Aesthetics  
Simon's Rock College, 1997

### PUBLICATIONS

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Laliberté, N. (*forthcoming*) "In Pursuit of a Monster: Militarization and (in)security in northern Uganda." *Geopolitics*.  
Laliberté, N. (*forthcoming*) "Building Peaceful Geographies in and through Violence" in *Geographies of Peace*. London: I.B. Tauris.  
The SIGJ2 Writing Collective. (2012) "What Can We Do? The Challenge of Being New Academics in Neoliberal Universities." *Antipode*, 44(4): 1055-1058.  
Laliberté, N., Driscoll Derickson, K., Dowler, L. (2010) "Advancements in Feminist Thought: Geography's Contribution to International Studies" in *The International Studies Encyclopedia*. Blackwell Reference Online.  
Laliberté, N. (2012) "Sophistication at a Country Pace: Community sustainability and amenity-based development." *GeoJournal*, 77(2), p.279-292.

### TEACHING

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*Teaching Awards*  
Harold F. Martin Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant Award (2012)  
College of Earth and Mineral Science's Graduate Student Teaching Award (2012)  
James T. Meyer Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant Award (2011)  
  
*Courses Taught (The Pennsylvania State University)*  
Representing Women and Gender in Literature, Art, and Popular Cultures (2013)  
Introduction to Urban Geography (2012)  
Cultural Geography (2009)

### GRANTS AND AWARDS

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Kopp International Achievement Award, Pennsylvania State University (2013)  
Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Award, NSF (2010-2011)  
Pruitt Fellowship, Society for Woman Geographers (2010-2011)  
Africana Research Center Research Grant (2009)  
Carter Academic Service Entrepreneur Award, Carter Foundation (2008)