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FEMALE LIVELIHOODS IN WAR-AFFECTED SOCIETIES
CASES FROM KITGUM DISTRICT OF NORTHERN UGANDA

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Dedication

To the women that earnestly shared their life stories with me. At the end of almost every conversation, you bid me farewell saying: …go and tell those people our problems. By putting this piece together, I am making an attempt at conveying your message.

In loving memory of my long departed parents:

✝ **Mary Bamuyaaga** and **Santo Katuromunda**

Abstract

This thesis addresses how women in the war ravaged Kitgum District of northern Uganda forge a livelihood for themselves and those they care for in an environment where livelihood systems were ruptured by violent conflict and assets for constructing a livelihood are unevenly owned and accessible by men and women. Also through this study, I aim to bring women's concerns in the post-war Kitgum to the fore for both public attention and action. Using a gender lens, in combination with the concepts of agency and empowerment, the study largely draws upon the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework as its analytical tool. Data for the study were collected by conducting seventeen qualitative interviews with women. Observations were also used.

The findings that emerge from the study indicate that women in war-affected northern Uganda mobilize diverse resources to maintain their wellbeing. As war visited both mental and physical debilitations on the men and demoralized them from working to provide for their families women came to form a major source of survival not only for their own children, but also other orphaned children and in some cases, their spouses. Women are not only mothers but breadwinners as well as providers.

Contrary to the view that war is destructive, my findings also suggest that war's shocks on traditional discriminatory institutions against women opens up spaces for women. They get out of the backyard, learn new skills, ideas and perform roles previously undertaken by men leading to a re-configuration of social orders, suggesting that war is also transformative.

Acknowledgements

List of Acronyms

DFID   Department for International Development

ICC   International Criminal Court

IDPC's   Internally Displaced People's Camps

LRA   Lord's Resistance Army

NURP   Northern Uganda Reconstruction Programme

NUSAF   Northern Uganda Social Action Fund

PRDP   Peace, Recovery and Development Plan

SLA/F   Sustainable Livelihoods Approach/Framework

UNDP   United Nations Development Programme

UNWFP United Nations World Food Programme

UNSCR United Nations Security Council Resolution

UPDF   Uganda People's Defence Forces

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Ever since Uganda became independent from Britain in 1962, the country has been plagued by a number of political conflicts. The longest was the war in northern Uganda mainly in Acholiland,1 between the rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and president Museveni's regime between 1987-2008. This war is the immediate backdrop of this thesis which investigates the role of women in Kitgum District in Acholiland in forging livelihoods for themselves and their dependants in the transition to peace. I seek to highlight the extremely important, yet overlooked role of women in both academic literature and in post-war reconstruction interventions. Understanding the role of women, both as victims, but also as crucial actors in reconstruction of communities after war, requires going back in time to look at the accounts of the causes of war and how war has changed and affected women's ability to forge livelihoods.

1.1 Representations of post-colonial wars in Uganda

Official documents and social researchers trace the origins of post-colonial conflicts and wars in northern Uganda in British rule methodology of ethnic and regional divisions (Dolan 2009; Finnström 2008; Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children 2001). British administration in Uganda was organized under the 'divide and rule' approach where different ethnic groups and the regions they came from were favored for different fields of activity. The population in the nouthern part of Uganda was mobilized for agriculture and the civil service, while the population from northern Uganda including Acholiland was drafted into security institutions namely, the police and military.[2] No single group or sub-region enjoyed both military and economic power simultaneously (Dolan 2009). With the departure of the British at Uganda's independence, ethnic and regional differences marked power structures and different levels of development. The majority of the educated elite lived in the south whilst the north remained at the margins of national development (Women's Commission for Refugee Women

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[1] Acholiland is composed of districts; Agago, Amuru, Gulu, Kitgum, Nwoya, Lamwo, and Pader; and Magwe County in South Sudan.

[2] Some time back, in a chat with an old man about careers, he boldly told me that, because of my height (I am short) in the past I would not have been recruited in the army. Only tall, well-built men like most Acholi men were drafted in the army.

and Children 2001:81). After independence, these ethnic and regional differences played a major role in Uganda's wars (Finnström 2008) and political leadership which derived significant force from the military, initially remained a preserve of the people from Northern Uganda.

Figure 1: *Map of Uganda showing Acholiland; an area affected most by the LRA insurgency*

Source: *Google map*

At independence, Apollo Milton Obote from the Lango ethnic group, neighbors of the Acholi in Northern Uganda the country's first leader. He was succeeded as president through a coup by Idi Amin Dada; a prominent soldier from the Kakwa, ethnic group in Northwestern Uganda. Amin ruled the country 1971-79 and committed mass killings of Acholi army personnel, prominent Acholi intellectuals and politicians (Finnström 2008:65). As a result, Amin's bestial rule

fomented domestic social and political tensions (Nayenga 1984). In his 'diversionary war theory', Levy (1989) argues that leaders threatened by domestic turmoil may provoke an armed crisis with a convenient rival in order to divert the nation's attention from internal troubles. Amin, conveniently walked this path by invading the neighboring Republic of Tanzania on allegations that the country had planned to oust him (Nayenga 1984:69) but it was possibly because Tanzania offered sanctuary to Appolo Milton Obote his fiercest nemesis. Amin's defeat in 1979 by Tanzanian forces brought Obote's second regime for five years (1980-1985), and culminated into another coup masterminded by two Acholi army generals, Tito Okello Lutwa and Bazilio Olara-Okello. A year later, Tito Okello Lutwa's military junta was overthrown by Yoweri Museveni from the Nyankore ethnic group in Southern Uganda which symbolized an end to Uganda's succession of leaders from the north.

Yoweri Museveni's power seizure in 1986, stoked a new wave of strife. Within two years of his reign, twenty seven different rebel groups emerged to resist his establishment. The (LRA) under the command of Joseph Kony, an Acholi, now wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for war crimes and crimes is on record as the most serious rebel group that still poses a threat to the Ugandan government. Uganda's postcolonial leaders mobilized their regimes along ethnic divides. Museveni on his part had evoked and preached Bantu commonality in an effort to mobilize local support. "He referred to the former forces and leaders from Northern Uganda 'Anyanyas' and caricatured them as 'animals', 'savages' and 'criminals' from the north that dominated the army" (Okuku 2002:23). Drawing on my own experience as a Ugandan, I hold that discourses of ethnic differences pointed out here, established during colonial rule, live on to this day.

The LRA's emergence in 1987 immediately after an Acholi-led government had been toppled by Museveni may have been an attempt at recouping power where it previously belonged- the North. This, however, is not to discount the view that the LRA rebellion, may have been due to the frustrations caused by the sense and reality of the marginalization and alienation of the northern region from developments in the rest of the country (Finnström 2008).

The war had serious ramifications for the entire population; men, women and children. Whilst the dominant representations above focus on ethnic groups and men, in examples of the roles that men played as ethnic political leaders, the talks I had with women highlighted their concerns

about their lives during and after war. The women that I spoke to for this study recounted losing their husbands and children. Their families were forced to split and disperse, their property was robbed or destroyed and they engaged in difficult, masculine and hazardous work for survival. Entire village communities were crammed in internally displaced people's camps (IDPs) and people's movements were seriously restricted due to curfews imposed by the (UPDF). The women were unable to access their farmlands, and were burdened by taking care of children orphaned by the war. All in all, the insurgency displaced nearly two million people thereby undermining their access to assets and productive activities (Gelsdorf *et al* 2012). There are reports about the killing and maiming of thousands of civilians, abductions[3] of over 25,000 children, and various forms of sexual and gender-based violence including defilement, rape, sexual slavery, forced marriages and physical disfigurement[4] (Liebling *et al* 2008).

1.2 From war to reconstruction: where are the women?

Right from the start, his regime Yoweri Museveni believed in and deployed a military approach to the conflict in the north.[5] However, as the war dragged on and had a toll on people as highlighted above, under pressure from the international community, Museveni was compelled to "Talk Peace" with the rebels. The talks commenced in July 2006 in Juba, the capital of South Sudan. The failure of the peace talks led to a regional military offensive called "Operation Lightning Thunder" in 2008 with support from the United States of America (Among 2009). Although the operation failed as LRA commanders escaped unharmed (Cakaj 2010:4), it crippled the insurgents' capacity to fight forcing them to retreat further into the Central African Republic where they were operating from[6] at the time of this study.

The promise of an end to living under threat in the region saw the emergence of a consortium of what may be called the transition to peace and recovery interventions. Prominent among these are the Northern Uganda Reconstruction Programme (NURP), Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP) and Northern Uganda Social Action Fund

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[3]The most memorable of these abductions, are the Aboke Girls where an estimated 139 secondary school female students from St. Mary's College boarding school were abducted by rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army on October 10, 1996, in Aboke, northern Apac District, Uganda.

[4]During fieldwork, I came into contact with shocking sites of two males whose lips were allegedly mutilated by the LRA.

[5]For example according to (Gersony 1997) four years into the conflict, Museveni launched the first military operation codenamed "Operation North" against the LRA

[6]http://news.yahoo.com/lras-kony-hunted-central-african-republic-014450599.html (Accessed on 11.06.2014)

(NUSAF).[7] They served similar intensions of redressing historical disparities between the underdeveloped North and the developed South of the country as well as providing livelihood and resettlement support to war-affected populations (Republic of Uganda 2007; 1999). Although this study neither sought to evaluate the effectiveness of these and other interventions nor find out whether they followed 'good practices' of ensuring women's participation in post-conflict reconstruction as stipulated in the UN Secretary General's seven-point plan (True 2013), as I set to find out how women cope in war-torn northern Uganda' I asked my female informants whether they had received support from these initiatives. Only one (a widow) out of the 17 women spoken to acknowledged having received two cows under the NUSAF project. The others said they received no support at all. Asked what support (if any) she may have received from these programmes, another woman had this to say:

> *I have not received anything. If you are not connected to those people, you can't get anything. Even when we were returning from the camp after the war ended, government promised us iron sheets for roofing our houses. Until now we have not received a single iron sheet.*

Another widow said:

> *You will get something from those people if you are known or if you have a man who will go there and speak. I asked our local leader to include my name on the list, he didn't mind. I don't know whether this is because I am alone with no husband. Instead of wasting time, I do my own things.*

This comment suggests that a woman's access to benefits from recovery efforts is to some degree influenced by the presence or involvement of a male person in a household.

All in all, the lack of trust, noninvolvement and exclusion in reconstruction interventions articulated in these responses confirms the claims that peace-building institutions do little to create livelihoods and economic opportunities for girls and women and empower them politically and economically after conflict (True 2013:2). This scenario contradicts the spirit of the United Nations Security Council Resolution UNSCR 1889 (2009) which, in recognition of women's key role in re-establishing the fabric of recovering society, calls for the need to support women's socioeconomic rights and efforts in post-conflict situations. We might ask: what are the implications of the women's absence or minimal presence in recovery interventions in northern

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[7]For a detailed coverage of the reconstruction programmes in northern Uganda after the war, see Gelsdorf, *et al* (2012).

Uganda from a livelihoods perspective? One possible explanation is that given resource scarcities rife in post-war settings, women mostly depend on themselves and do so under complex circumstances.

1.3 Statement of the problem

When looked at from the perspective of women's everyday lives, it becomes apparent that even before the first gunshot, women are already in war. The violence that war brings ma be seen as merely part of a 'continuum of violence' that women experience during their lifetime .Whilst war may be an intensification or distortion of 'peacetime' violence, it nonetheless draws upon and reflects other war-like traditional and social practices that disadvantage women outside of the context of war (Cohn 2013). Cultural norms, family traditions and religious practices may all impede women's efforts to earn a living. In many developing countries like Uganda whose economic prosperity is thwarted by conflict, traditional customs often dictate; women's movements, ownership rights and access to credit services or rights to acquire and own productive capitals.

In these environments, men are often the sole landholders and inheritors of household assets; they obtain credit from state institutions and represent 'the family' when it comes to procurement of welfare or relief benefits Cohn (2013). During wartime when men are away, their wives cannot access credit. When it is impossible to arrange for other men to help with tilling the land, chances for the survival of the family are severely compromised. In such androcentric cultures,[8] women have a disadvantaged position which is further exacerbated by the abnormal burdens of war making it difficult for them to cope during or after violent conflict. In this light, this study seeks to investigate and understand women's day-to-day survival experiences in the post war Kitgum District of northern Uganda.

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[8]The term androcentrism was coined by Gilman Perkins-an American feminist and sociologist to describe a male-centered culture or system of thought in which the male is identified and valued as the norm and the female as deviant from that norm. Gilman states in this work that ''all our human scheme of things rests on the same tacit assumption; man being held the human type; woman a sort of accompaniment and subordinate assistant, merely essential to the making of people '' *See* Gardner (2006).

1.4 Research assumption

The study revolves around the assumption that women in war-affected northern Uganda mobilize diverse resources to maintain their wellbeing, thereby manifesting social agency and creativity.

1.5 Research questions

The central question that this thesis seeks to answer is: How do the women in the war-torn northern Uganda forge a livelihood for themselves and their dependants?

In order to answer this question, other guiding sub-questions that split and further specify the central question into some areas for inquiry are formulated:

a) What sorts of resources or assets do the women draw upon to maintain their well-being and that of their dependants?

b) What are their sources of income?

c) What are the implications of women's sources of income and life aspirations for local gender roles and expectations?

d) Do the women's livelihood strategies reproduce or challenge gender roles?

e) How do the women's pre-war livelihood strategies compare with those of the post-war period?

1.6 Motivation for undertaking this study

"Personal experiences, academic conversations…intellectual curiosity spurred by readings…may become the starting point for meaningful naturalistic inquiry" (Lofland et.al 2006:9-13).

Early May 2012, I got an opportunity to work with an international organization and I was posted in Arua District in West Nile region, a place I had never been to before. While in Arua town, I met a friend who was born and raised in war ravaged Gulu District in Northern Uganda. We had been together at Makerere University for our undergraduate program. We had a lengthy conversation that started with reflections about life at university, touching difficulties with finding work after many years of schooling and finally focused on the situation in Northern Uganda after the war.

My colleague was baffled to learn that I had never been to Gulu, a place he considered not far away from the country's capital city, Kampala. "How come you have never been to Gulu?", he asked. Contrary to what many of you think, Gulu is so near to Kampala. I will be going home (Gulu) next month, so please come with me if you like" he added. A month later, I traveled with him to Gulu. At about 9:00 a.m on a Sunday after we had arrived in his home village, the encounter with Adokora[9] (*fictitious name)* a woman probably in her late forties, with one ear and a disfigured face as a result facial burns she had sustained from the war captured my attention. She was on her way to a nearby well to fetch water and later that evening she reappeared for a women's meeting at my friend's home. With a chief leader or *'rot-akol'*[10] as they refer to in their language, these women meet every Sunday to pool money through their village savings and loans association (VSLA) to lend to each other on a weekly basis. I also learnt that the women were usually busy with group cultivation of their gardens. A major role for *'rot-akol,'* the chief leader was to mobilize and inspire all women in the area in the group for rotational cultivation of group members' gardens. *Rot-akol* decides on how many women will visit a particular home and do the work within a given number of days usually between two or three. After digging they spend the whole afternoon eating and discussing important issues regarding their families. Seeing these women's ingenious behavior reminded me of Dowling's (1981) claims of women's fear of self independence in her bestselling book *The Cinderella Complex: Women's Hidden Fear of Independence.*

The Cinderella complex explains the perpetual fear of independence in women. Dowling's thesis is that although there may be exceptions, many women do not seem to believe that they can take care of themselves. Instead, they think that for them to survive and manage life, a male figure is needed to care of and support them. They perceive themselves as soft princesses waiting for a prince to come to their rescue. A deep-seated wish to be taken care of by males is the chief force holding women down. It is the cause for both their low self-esteem and suffering today, she argues. Observing the actions of the women I wondered whether the actions of these very creative women were not at odds with Dowling's portrayal of women as slothful only waiting to

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[9]Adokora, I was informed, was a victim of the 2004 LRA attacks on Barlonyo camp for IDP's located in Lira district. On that fateful attack called 'Kill Every living thing' under the command of Okot Odhiambo one of the senior LRA leaders, over 300 people are reported to have been killed, while others such as Adokora sustained severe burns and other bodily deformities.

[10] It is my friend's mother who is *'rot-akol'.*

be saved by and depend on me. Is it only those women who are quite sure that someone is out there waiting to be depended on that passively sit back and wait to be cared for? Could it be that women have strength that they 'pull-out' to exhibit and act only when in crises such as after the marriage has fallen apart (as Dowling speaks of herself) or if there has been a death of a male breadwinner?

Adokora's group of women who seemed determined to search for a means to live in the face of the post-war harsh realities was an invaluable source of inspiration. This provoked the thought for undertaking a study about how women, crucial partners in shoring up three pillars of peace: economic recovery, social cohesion and political legitimacy (Schnabel and Tabyshalieva 2012) would be a good idea. The inspiration to undertake a study of this kind also derives in part from my career goal: "becoming an advocate, promoter, and defender of the rights of populations whose voices are mute in the face of life -threatening occurrences yet lack tools to bring their predicament into public space for attention and action". The wider community of women in war-torn northern that find representation in Adokora's group is one out of the many categories of vulnerable communities whose cause deserves advocacy and promotiom. Advocacy necessitates good knowledge of the; issue at stake, the cause and the obtaining policy instruments among other factors. Undertaking a study of this kind is just one step towards gaining the knowledge necessary for the pursuit of both such women's cause as well as my ambition.

Studies suggest that even after peace, women tend to remain socially, politically and economically marginalised and face a host of difficulties in establishing a livelihood like men do (Azza 2000). One possible explanation for this state of affairs could be that, given the scarcity of resources in the immediate post-war environment, gender concerns often fall off the nation's radar and are trivialised by those in leadership positions. What the politicians the majority of them being men, label as 'the core interests of the nation' are often accorded higher primacy over the 'unimportant' gendered concerns, begging the question as to why gendered concerns are not central to the definition of the nation's concerns as a whole (op.cit). McKay (2004) seems to make a similar claim as Azza commenting that because nationalistic loyalties are more valued than notions of gender equality at the end of war, concerns about post-conflict construction override interest in promoting women's equal status and opportunities within a society.

Therefore the cardinal goal of this thesis lay in the desire to give voice to one of the issues that confront the women (their livelihoods experiences) who through what Manchanda (2001) calls 'domestic activism' struggle to (re)organise family survival and become the bulwark of the social and economic survival of the community .

The intention was to hold purposive interviews with the women of Kitgum, get first-hand insight for incorporation into advocacy strategies and policy discourses aiming to improve their living conditions in the post-war environment. The rationale was to heighten the awareness of the women's lived survival realities, which has not been accorded the attention it deserves by the research community.

1.7 Relevance of the study to peace studies

Much of the literature on gender and war indicates that in the bubbling cauldron of war and violence, women, more than men suffer the greatest of devastations including-rape, defilement, murder, forced marriages, unplanned pregnancies, widowed and trauma. This is partly because of the phenomenon that may be called "domestically jammed".[11] This situation is engendered by the women's care giving role(s) that impact on their capacity to protect themselves. This, equally makes their mobility to run for safety very difficult (Martines 2002). Regrettably, because of the de-prioritization and trivialization of the gender specific concerns in favour of the general 'national issues' in the aftermath, the women that endured the heinous acts and effects of the masculine wars, are either forgotten or sidestepped when national peace-building plans are being drawn.

Where women's gendered needs are included into peace-building frameworks they remain on paper but in practice are barely discernible on the ground, a situation that is reminiscent of social and gender injustice. Yet any form of social injustice is structural violence (Groten and Jansen 1981: 177) which is quite opposed to the ideals of peace. The famous Norwegian peace studies scholar Galtung defines the concept of peace, by drawing a dichotomy between what he calls 'negative' and 'positive' peace (Galtung 1967). When a society is not experiencing organized

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[11]As a result of this phenomenon women are trapped at home and left to care for the small children, the elderly and disabled, after war has denuded the community of all its men, or when men join rebel ranks or when they run for their safety.

collective violence or war, he suggests, then, such a society is experiencing negative peace. Although Galtung seems explicit in his definition of negative peace, his explanation(s) of what constitutes positive[12] peace is rather imprecise. He for instance suggests that positive peace be understood as a synonym for all other 'good things' what Aristotle may have termed 'good life' in the world community, with less emphasis on the absence of violence or what he merely calls negative peace. The search for and the availability of those conditions that facilitate a healthy living and positive relations bring about positive peace, he adds.

Drawing on Galtung's proposition, I define positive peace to mean a desirable state of affairs arising out of the presence of conditions that first of all enable our immediate human survival, such as the physiological needs and secondly, these conditions should be able to promote; just and harmonious relations between or among individuals, or group members in a community. The list of these conditions is innumerable and may include access to food and clean drinking water, good shelter, education for all, gender justice, security from physical harm, as well respect for inviolable human rights at local and global levels. Clearly, the availability of and access to the means to living a meaningful life signify social justice which is typically synonymous with positive peace (Groten and Jansen 1981: 178).

This thesis seeks to find out how women after devastating wars, often being the sole providers for their families are able to access food, cloth themselves and their dependants, and how they work and shoulder the "burden of subsistence". In other words, it is about how women who in situations with semblance of negative peace, after guns have gone silent, so courageously search for positive peace. By doing so, they may challenge established gender roles. Many governments seem to be satisfied by the mere suppression of insurgency, yet fail to address women's welfare and economic needs – a course of action antithetical to a durable, just and sustainable peace.

1.8 Summary

The chapter has shown that since independence, Uganda has been embroiled in violent power struggles embedded in discourses of ethnic differences. More than any other region, the northern

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[12]Galtung's list of ten items which he claims are fundamental to the cultivation of positive relations include: presence of cooperation, freedom from fear, freedom from want, economic growth and development, absence of exploitation, equality, justice, freedom of action, pluralism and dynamism.

region, where this study was conducted and home to Uganda's first postcolonial leaders, bore the brunt of these political crises. The most recent war is the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) that drove millions of people including women into displacement, caused million deaths, and shattered the region's livelihoods systems. This war, is widely understood as having been caused by regional socio-economic imbalances between the north and the south and problems born out of colonial rule and ethnic divisions (Dolan 2009). It has been pointed out that representations of war as post-colonial ethnic conflicts, reconstruction initiatives and post war focus on national issues and loyalties overshadowed gendered concerns and women in war, peace and reconstruction periods. My assumption is that war not only has destructive effects. For women who in peaceful times experienced structural disadvantages and 'structural violence' war may be transformative, linked to a process of positive peace manifest in the roles women take in forging post-war livelihoods, sometimes challenging established social orders.

1.9 The structure of the thesis

The thesis is composed of five chapters and proceeds in the following way. The second chapter presents and discusses the methodology within which the study was conceived and investigated. The third chapter outlines a conceptual, theoretical framework built around the connections between gender, livelihoods and war's destructive and transformative effects. The fourth focuses on the presentation, interpretation, analysis and discussion of findings based on interviews and observations of women in Kitgum District. In the fifth-last chapter, a summary of the study's findings and concluding comments is offered.

Chapter 2: Methodological approach

This chapter presents the methodology used to investigate and understand female livelihoods in Kitgum. It explores what Maxwell (2013) calls the where, who, when, how [and the why-my addition] of conducting social research. I also reflect on my role during the research, including my position as a male doing research on women in an unfamiliar linguistic and social-cultural context.

2.1 The research site

This research was conducted in Kitgum District-one of the seven districts that altogether form the larger Acholiland which is home to the Acholi people who speak Luo language. As of the 2002 national housing and population census, the Acholi constituted 1.1 million people of the total population of Uganda.[13] Kitgum is located on the border with South Sudan and because of its proximity to South Sudan and the nature of the porous borders between Uganda and South Sudan, some nationals from South Sudan easily cross the border into Uganda to access social services. As (Womakuyu 2012) informs, out of over 300,000 people served by Kitgum hospital, some came from as far as South Sudan. There seems also to be informal trade between people living on the borders from either side of the boarder.

Although nearly all districts in Acholiland suffered from LRA incursions, more than any other district, Kitgum's nearness to South Sudan exposed it to rebel attacks as South Sudan was a potential hideout for the LRA insurgents. Based on this, Kitgum was deemed as a suitable field site from which 'rich data' necessary for the study would be obtained. Curiosity and unfamiliarity are yet two other factors that informed my choice of the study area. To many of the citizens from Southwestern Uganda where I come from, Northern Uganda of which Kitgum is part is foreign land. They imagine that it is troubled land unsuitable for human habitation. Similarly, to some from the North, Western Uganda is alien as some of my informants wondered why I traveled 'all the way from the far South West to the North to merely talk to them'.

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[13] http://library.health.go.ug/publications/leadership-and-governance-monitoring-and-evaluation/population/uganda-population-and (Accessed: 20.01.2014).

Thus my choice of Kitgum as a study site arose partly out of curiosity to learn about that part of Uganda that I had only heard of and learnt about through the media. Conducting field research in an unfamiliar setting in which the researcher has no previous contact, can bring new and fascinating experience (Neuman 2011). An entirely new social context however, may overwhelm or intimidate field researchers (op.cit) especially 'first timers' in fieldwork practices. Indeed at the beginning of fieldwork, I was feeling anxious. In part, this was because I was uncertain whether the women I intended to talk to would be willing to allow a stranger whom they possibly never expected to meet again and would possibly not want to 'waste' their valuable time with intrusive interrogations about personal matters (Maxwell 2013:91).

In a new setting, the researcher is able to see a web of new events and activities that form 'solid material' that can make a rich study of the phenomenon possible (Charmaz 2006). Bogdan and Taylor (1975) recommend that researchers choose fieldwork sites in which the subjects are strangers to them and in which they have no particular professional knowledge or expertise and thereby do not risk taking events for granted as an 'insider researcher might do . Voicing similar concerns, Glesne and Peshkin (1992) question studies that examine 'your own *backyard* as this is likely to influence the researcher to take sides or see things from only one person's perspective .

In sum, Kitgum was deliberately selected because of the LRA attacks it suffered and the associated consequences of the war. Being the epicenter of war rendered it a suitable site from which 'thick- data' necessary to answer the research problem would be obtained. Also, I thought that choosing an unfamiliar site other than those I already had knowledge about would make it easier for me to be alert to different events that would enrich my understanding of the problem.

2. 2 Access and a cultural broker

Researchers gain 'entrance' to the research context in various ways (Roberts 2007: 56). Access through relationship(s) with community leaders is one of them. Many times, people are reluctant to talk to people they are not familiar with. In such situations, the researcher may require assistance for "proper introductions" from someone within the community. I mediated access through a female 'insider' and a cultural broker who worked as my research assistant as well. Two reasons explain this decision: the first was a previous bad experience associated with my identity and the second was a language barrier. Being from the Bantu ethnic group of the current

president (Museveni), on a few occasions while in Arua *(see section 1.6)* in casual talk(s) with friends, references were made to me as the president's spy.[14]

Thus, during the course of planning for my journey to Kitgum, I still feared that for the same reasons of my identity I might be (mis)represented just as it had been in Arua. To deflect such negative impressions as well as enhance my credibility and trustworthiness (Liamputtong 2008: 9)**,** I negotiated my way into the community through one of their own; who in the words of Eide and Allen (2005) was a "Cultural broker".[15] A cultural broker is a person who serves as a link between individuals or groups who are culturally and linguistically different (ibid: 50).[16] This means that such an individual has to share not all but some characteristics in common with the group being studied. The identified cultural broker was; a female in her early thirties and a native of Kitgum, fluently spoke both English and the local language, Luo and also worked with a non-governmental organization that provided services to the community under study.

As a cultural broker, she was helpful in many other ways. For instance, for all the areas I visited, I first had to notify and introduce myself and the purpose of my presence through my cultural broker to the local leaders.[17] On one occasion, a local leader attempted to ask for some 'token' in form of money for having allowed me access into his community. In a friendly manner, the cultural broker reminded the leader that since he was a 'focal person' for the programme that she was overseeing in that area, he already benefitted enough. Tactfully, she thwarted the local leader's scheme, an issue that would possibly have been tricky to deal with, without taking advantage of 'knowing the person", concept (Liamputtong 2008:9). Not only did she provide 'proper' introductions and 'protector' roles among local area leaders, but also eased the

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[14]Although they would later say they merely were joking (which was likely) I "never treated the situation as a game".

[15]After booking in a lodge on my arrival in Kitgum, I made a leisurely walk to town and also find something to eat. In the restaurant where I had my meal, sat a lady in one corner. After I had eaten, I walked to her, introduced myself and what I was in Kitgum for. Luckily, it is this same lady that turned out to be my broker. [15]At the time of this research project she was on a one month leave. She told me that she was happy to find something to make her busy during her "redundancy period".

[16]Both Liamputtong (2008) and Eide and Allen (2005) show that fieldworkers doing cross-cultural cultural research (such as this one) in which the researcher is often at a greater distance from study participants both culturally and linguistically, cultural brokers are a useful tool in dealing with the language and cultural issues throughout the research process.

[17]Uganda has an unwritten law which demands every 'newcomer' or stranger in the area to make his/her presence known to the Local Council One (LC1) leader. If a stranger is being hosted by someone, his/her host does the introduction/reporting of his/her guest to the local leaders.

establishment of contacts with potential participants who through 'snowballing' helped recruit more others (Eide and Allen 2005). [18]

A research situation is one fraught with a definite asymmetry of power in which the researcher-who defines the situation, introduces the topics of the conversation and through further questions steers the course of the conversation wields more power than the participants (Kvale 1996: 126) However, it turned out that having someone the community knew and trusted, introducing me as a 'good friend' helped to balance the power relations between myself and the informants (Eide and Allen 2005).The other positive effect was the degree of responsiveness demonstrated by the informants' willingness to participate in the study.

During our first interview, a group of people, both men and women showed up wishing to be interviewed as well. They had been told that two people one of whom they knew (the broker) were at a neighbor's home interviewing her. We explained to the men that the study targeted women only. Reluctantly, they left the interview scene. The women, who stayed apparently, looked to fall in the same age bracket as the one that we were having an interview with. Here, the concern was that recruiting people, who looked almost alike, was likely to pose sample diversity limitations (Miles and Huberman 1994) yet tapping into the particularities of each informant's relevant lived experience was one of the goals of this study. To make these women feel that their volunteered presence was welcome, very short 'talks' were arranged with them though their perspectives were not captured for inclusion in the study.

2.3 Selecting a method of data collection

The decisions and choices regarding which method and data collection techniques to use in gathering empirical material flow from a number of questions. These include but are by no means limited to; who to recruit, how many to recruit, gaining access to the field and study participants, among others. Many scholars seem to agree that 'what one wants to study' commonly called a 'research problem/question' is the basic guiding factor (Charmaz, 2014:79; 2006). Bryman for example says that choices of research strategy, design or method have to be dovetailed with the specific research question being investigated (2012:41). The data this thesis

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[18]Three informants in a village where homes were a bit nearer to each other volunteered to walk and guide us to other homes where we would meet other informants.

relied upon were based on interviewing and observations. Ideally, informant identification and recruitment should precede the actual administration of any tools for data collection.

2.4 Choice of informants: who and how many?

"One cannot study everyone everywhere doing everything, even in a single case" (Miles and Huberman 1984 cited in Maxwell 2013:96).

Although almost everyone can become an informant, not everyone makes a good informant (Spradly 1979:45). Selecting informants who will provide good and relevant data is essential to a study. If the overall aim of the research is not to produce generalizable findings as was the case in this study, but to delve in depth into a particular situation with a view to exploring the specifics, then the selection of informants is preferably purposive sampling (Hennink *et al* 2013; Denscombe 2010).[19] Informants have to be carefully chosen based on the knowledge that they have a unique contribution to make. A good informant is one who has been or is at the centre of events (Neuman (2011). Based on the above considerations, the study was disposed to be selective, focusing exclusively only on informants who exhibited the following specific characteristics.

    i.   All had to be female;

    ii.   They were long standing residents of Kitgum.

Additionally, drawing on my lived experience as a child born and raised in a typical village in Uganda, I was aware that ordinary people such as those I sought to interview are usually busy with routine gardening and other chores. As a result, some may, as earlier noted be reluctant to accept a snoopy and intrusive researcher waste their planned valuable time. Therefore, care was taken to select and talk to those women who despite their busy schedule, exhibited willingness to lend an ear to a stranger. Fortunately, nearly all those contacted, consented and spared some time to share their life experiences with the researcher.[20]

The decision concerning 'how many to select and recruit for participation' was largely informed by; the depth of data, variations in experiences and the nature of data collection instruments. To gain a detailed understanding of women's lived worlds; I needed to 'go slow' in asking questions

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[19]It means that the researcher selects individuals for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study.

[20]One of the informants who we found weeding in her groundnuts garden temporarily halted the activity to tell to have an interview with us.

and taking time to listen to their responses. Developing rapport with these women was important for good conversations. If the interviewee doesn't believe she is being kindly and sympathetically treated by the interviewer, cautions Oakley (1981), then she will not come up with the desired information. Secondly, variations in women's experiences were of interest. I envisaged that these variations were unlikely to come out if informants were not individually spoken to. Thus, I identified qualitative in-depth interviews as best suited for this project. First, they allow even reticent participants to speak. Secondly, they offered the possibility of modifying the line of enquiry as well as following up interesting responses (op.cit) as they unfold during the conservation.

Listening attentively to women's accounts while at the same time cultivating rapport and looking out for variations in women's experiences, necessitated the identification and selection of a manageable number of informants. Thus, 20 women were selected for interviewing. However, once the interviewing was under way, 2 interviews were prematurely terminated.[21] In total 17 interviews were fully conducted. To ensure that the data collected did not overly repeat itself due to the size of informants, the 20th was left out. In fact by the fourteenth interview, I had noticed a repetition of some aspects and themes in our conversations.

However, since informants were selected from different sub-counties (but for anonymity reasons I do not mention the sub-counties here) I carried on with interviewing in the hope that new and different themes would emerge. Nonetheless, no new aspects emerged.

2.5 Interview: A qualitative data-gathering technique

As qualitative researchers, we collect people's life stories in order to study various aspects of the human experience and the primary way we gather stories by interviewing people. When we interview, we ask people to share their stories (Jacob and Furgerson 2012:1)

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[21]In one case during the interview process, the informant later recalled that she had to take some maize for milling, so she could prepare lunch for the children who she said had not had supper. She apologized to us and asked if it was possible for us to arrange and come back another day for a fresh interview session. In the other, as the interview was going on, another woman, apparently a friend to the one we were having an interview with arrived. The interview was cut short as our informant told us that together with her friend they had to go and buy some necessities from a market that operates once a month.

In *Learning from Strangers*, Weiss (1994:1) states that interviewing informs us about; the nature of a people's social life, the challenges they confront as they lead their lives and their interior experiences. Precisely, this was the study's goal: understanding the very social-economic lives and situations of women in the aftermath of war and social upheaval in northern Uganda. The study therefore adopted a qualitative approach viewed as compatible with feminism's tenets such as avoiding during research "treating women as objects to be controlled by the researcher's technical procedures"(Bryman 2012:411). This meant that a method of qualitative interviewing that provided a greater opportunity for women's voices to be heard had to be used (ibid: 411). Through interviews, women were invited to tell in their own words about their lived world" (Kvale 1996).

The study focused on and looked for differences among the women in regard to how they managed and lived their lives (Reinharz 1992: 24). Even among women of the same ethnic group such as the Acholi women of Kitgum, there are variables that draw a distinction between and among them. Tapping into "the particularities of each woman's relevant experience" required the use of an approach that would provide a private and quiet atmosphere in which informants felt they would freely talk about their experiences without fear of gossip being spread in the community (King and Horrocks 2010:42).

Such an approach was found in qualitative individual interviews that involve relatively intimate face-to-face relations and fit best with feminist commitments as they allow women to speak more openly. Other methods such as 'group talks' in which some participants were likely to conform to responses of other members in the group even though they did not agree (Liamputtong (2011: 84) or even live the group discussed experiences, were considered unsuitable for the study.

2.5.1 Interviewing in action: positioned practices

All the 17 informants selected were interviewed once. The interviews were conducted in a bilingual context. Almost all the interviews lasted approximately for an hour. The research took place during the time of the second farming cycle of the year between July and November 2013.

As such, in the morning hours, the locals were always busy working in their gardens. [22] This meant that to be able to find informants, we had to wait until the community members returned from their gardens late in the afternoon or evening. A total of 16 interviews were conducted while seated at the informants' homes. One informant was interviewed while weeding in her garden near her home.

Before entering the field, I had constructed an interview guide which mainly served two purposes; first as a memory aid and secondly as the name suggests it helped guide our 'purposive chats' on the research problem. But because I intended to make the interview sessions both flexible and relaxed, participants were encouraged to talk as much as they wished on any questions posed to them. As a result, often interviewees veered from the main questions into other issues that they had not been asked. Through this 'veering-off', informants raised some issues which were initially not thought about but were found to be relevant to the topic. Much important information was gathered in this way. Some questions that were not formerly included in the interview guide were spontaneously created in reaction to the interviewees' comments. Consequently, although useful in guiding the conversations, the interview guide was not rigidly followed. As a first step toward cultivating closeness with informants, two things were done.

First, I began each interview by talking openly about myself and allowing the informants to get to know as much as they may have desired about me. Providing a fuller image of the intrusive outsider to the informants seems to have helped break down some of the walls of distrust and fear that are intrinsic to qualitative research settings (Achebe 2002). Disclosure of who I am started with my very first encounter with the 'cultural broker'. It appears once she knew, trusted and accepted to work with me, the research participants did.

Secondly, as a way to put informants at ease, each interview began with standard questions that asked for demographic information such as the informant's age, marital status and household details.[23] After creating an atmosphere in which the informants were now relaxed, then brief and simple questions about income sources and livelihood activities were posed to them. The simple

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[22]On our first arrival in one of the villages around 11 a.m, we were met with sullen silence as the residents had been away to their gardens. This is the time for sowing 'simsim' a popular crop.

[23] See appendix for the interview guide.

questions not only simplified the cultural broker's task of translating them into the local language but also allowed informants the opportunity to respond to them with ease as well as speak freely about diverse issues in the world around them. In addition, most of those interviewed said the topic was good to talk about as it concerned their day-to-day lives. Asked what her opinion was about the issues discussed, one informant said: *But this is life. This is how we are living. Why would I not talk about it?* Despite this registered success, a few hold-ups concerning male intrusion were encountered. These are explored in section 2.7.3; in discussions about the implications of my identity as a male researcher interviewing women.

2.6 Observations

Observations also seem to be pre-eminently the appropriate technique for getting at 'real life' in the real world (Robson 2002:310).

Observation was an important tool for data collection alongside the qualitative interviews in this project. As a research method, not only does observation enable the researcher to systematically observe and record people's behavior and actions, but also obtain a *thick description* of the social setting, the activities and the people studied (Hennink, et al 2013). Observations were quite useful for this project.

I observed the participants as they went about their businesses, including activities related to their livelihood enterprises. The activities for example included feeding goats, weeding in the gardens, feeding chickens and attending to their small shops. This deepened my understanding of the context within which events were occurring, and also enabled me to learn and have a clearer and wider picture of what the women actually did as they struggled to eke out a living. Through observation, photographic images of these enterprises were captured using a camera. These photographs reflected the reality on ground and also lent further clues about the lifestyles that the informants lived.

A keen observation of the informants' body language made possible the management of the interview processes. During one interview, an informant's 'eyes filled' as she recounted her past bad experience with her former husband. She was obviously traumatized. In order to balance both the need to avert informant distress and also ensure the continuation of the interview, I devised a plan to divert her attention from recounting her distressful past. To achieve this, I

asked the broker to ask her to tell us more about her brother who was studying at university in Kampala.[24] This seemed to have worked as the never made mention of the other 'bad story' when we returned to the core subject matter [25] of our interview.

Interviews and questionnaire responses are notorious for discrepancies between what people say that they have done, or will do, and what they actually did, or will do (Robson 2002). Correlated with Robson's observation is the social desirability bias that has its origin in social psychology. It connotes a tendency for research subjects to give socially desirable responses instead of choosing responses that are reflective of their true feelings and actions (Grimm 2010). Put in another way, people tend to 'adjust the truth' so that they sound nicer, richer, and more desirable to the researcher (Williams and Heikes 1993). Babbie makes a similar observation when she states that whenever you ask people for information, they answer through a filter of what will make them look good (Babbie 1983). This is especially true if they are being interviewed in a face-to-face situation as was the case in this study. Thus, for example to give the impression of being hard-working a desirable attribute and not slothful a socially disapproved trait, an informant, just to use the words of Goffman can 'present a false front' (Goffman 1959:66) by claiming to undertake certain projects when in reality she does not. Though I do not cast doubt on the credibility of informants' accounts, the observation(s) in this study were a kind of 'reliability check' for comparing informants' verbal accounts with what was taking place in their lived world (Yeandle 1984). As Marshall and Rossman (1995:8) state: "observation allows researchers to check situations informants have described in interviews, thereby making them aware of distortions or inaccuracies in description provided by those informants" . To sum up, in this research, observation served mainly two roles: first as a tool for establishing whether or not the informants' everyday life was in agreement or 'contradiction with what they had openly avowed' (Goffman 1959) and as a `supportive' or `supplementary' technique (Robson, 1993), aiming to complement information obtained through interviews where the women were actively involved as participants. Finally as Cremin and Slatter (2004:463) correctly put it, it was also hoped that observation would bring to light things which might have escaped the conscious

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[24] As a way for establishing rapport, during the first few minutes of our meeting, I started by asking informants about simple things unrelated to the main topic. That's how she came to tell us about her brother (a joy to the family) who had defied the hard post war circumstances to join university.

[25] By core subject matter, I mean those issues that directly concern the research topic-female livelihoods.

awareness of the informants as well as those which they may have felt reluctant to talk about in my presence

2.7 Challenges and fieldwork reflections

2.7.1 Language

Cross-cultural qualitative research, therefore, requires a significant dependence on interpreters/translators and field assistants familiar with both the language and culture of the studied population. However, there is little discussion on the implications of introducing language assistants into the interview context and hence into the knowledge- creation process within qualitative research (Hennink 2008: 25)

This study was conducted in a setting in which I as a researcher was an 'outsider' both culturally and linguistically. Language is the key to understanding human interactions, as it is the major symbolic system for establishing meaning (Lofland *et.al* 2006:87). Language is critical to the process of data generation. To bridge the language gap, I depended very significantly on the bilingual cultural broker mentioned earlier. [26] This strategy was not without its limitations, the most obvious one being 'data dilution'. There is no doubt that the passage of data from its 'original' source-research participants through an interpretive sieve caused it to lose "flavor and nuances of the participant's original expressions (Hennink *et al* 2013:215). Translation does not always convey the original author's intent (Schultz and Schultz 2011: 7).

The changes in data were made quite visible in the length difference between the original narratives produced by informants in their native Acholi language and the texts translated to English by the broker. These differences might have been as a result of the interpretation and translation style used during interviews. The consecutive style in which only one person speaks at a time was preferred for use [27] since it suited well the face-to-face conversations. The challenge, however, was that after a long and detailed account by the informant, the interpreter and broker only [re]produced shorter versions of the original account suggesting omissions majorly due to memory drops on part of the broker, as well as lack of lexicon or conceptual equivalence. Two quotes below by the broker and interpreter reveal these shortcomings:

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[26] As I indicated before she was a native who spoke both her native Acholi language and English.
[27] *See* Baker et al. (1991) for translation/interpretation styles.

You see some of them talk a lot, and by the time they finish, I have already forgotten some of the things they said. So it's hard. But I am trying my best. Aren't I?

Mmh…there are some words in our language that I cannot translate to English. I tell you some words are complicated.

As can be seen, there was a considerable degree of loss or distortion of meaning of what the informants recounted. The fact that the findings for this study were based on the text translated by the broker, supposedly dilute and not the informants' original expressions, suggests that I almost ended up having the broker speaking for the informants, rather than the informants speaking for themselves. In a way this almost defied the logic of feminist interviewing which aims at accessing women's ideas, thoughts and memories and generally the worlds they live in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher.

2.7.2 Positioning the researcher

I belong to the Bantu ethnic group and not from the community that I studied. I had no knowledge of the geography of the area, local language and other figures of speech. The fieldwork underlying this thesis took place in an at large unfamiliar terrain, meaning that I lacked first-hand knowledge of the Acholi cultural values, etiquettes and everyday routines. In order to gain entry into and build rapport in the research community, my first order of business was to put a considerable degree of control in the informants' hands. Through the cultural broker, I allowed myself to be accessible and open to whatever questions that informants put to me. Providing details of my ethnic background and culture constituted what Reinharz (1992) calls the 'researcher's self-disclosure to the informants and served the function of easing the informants' acceptance and I think generally eased my field entry.

Being a cultural outsider, it was a bit difficult for me to 'read' the informants' body gestures and patterns of emotion during conversations in order to be able to differ or vary modes of questioning to avoid causing pain. This was particularly so during conversations when informants were asked to reflect upon how their present livelihood activities compared to those of the pre-war times. Such moments turned out to be emotionally disturbing as they sometimes aroused memories of loss of their dear ones who were anchors of their families.

Similarly, my status as an outsider put me in a situation where I could not easily compare the participants' informants' bodily gestures and actions with spoken words so as to be able to ascertain whether or not what took place during our conversational interactions was a 'negotiated reality'(Ohnuki-Tierney, 1984) or 'managed performances' (Goffman 1959). Ohnuki-Tierney informs that, researchers who often find themselves in new socio-cultural spaces and are typically identifiable as outsiders, on many occasions, are at first sight "received with red carpet and then presented with the exact outcomes of how hospitable "host people react and act" (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1984:585 in Oware 2011). More often than not, this type of host-visitor interactions is characterized by both watchfulness and precaution. Neither the host nor the visitor acts rashly. Every form of behavior-word or action is calculated. No one wants to be seen as acting impolitely. Mistakes are cautiously avoided. Socially disapproved conduct is deliberately withheld and hidden away from the 'front stage' Goffman (1959). In such situations, actors i.e. (both host and guest), exhibit what may be called 'faked impressions' as they behave in a manner that may only display their positive side while concealing their negative one. In other words, the presence of distinctly identifiable outsiders tempers with the naturalness of field settings and also compromises the free flow of human actions.

2.7.3 A man interviewing women

"However effective a male interviewer might be at getting women interviewees to talk, there is still necessarily all additional dimension when the interviewer is also a woman, because both parties share a subordinate structural position by virtue of their gender" (Finch 1984:76).

The researcher's gender with respect to the group that she/he is studying is an important issue and has received increasing attention from social scientists (*see* Reinharz 1992; Finch 1984; Oakley 1981). How can a male researcher who conducts fieldwork among women approach and understand the views of his female interlocutors even though he does not share similar experiences with them (Berliner and Falen 2008). Finch (1984) and Oakley (1981) maintain that men cannot objectively interview women. Others insist that gender may have little effect on the interview (Del Martin, 1976, Berliner and Falen, 2008 and Padfield and Procter, 1996).

In the context of this study, my identity as an interviewer of the opposite sex seems to have had an impact on the way interviews were conducted. As will be shown later in the section on moral

and ethical issues, before talking to married women, I first sought for their spouses' approval. Despite this, some men, kept flitting around the scene of the interview, an indication that they may have been inquisitive to know what the conversations involved. They were ideally uncomfortable. Looking rather restless, thrice, a spouse of one of the informants intervened in the talk by asking whether it was possible for him to participate and assist his wife answer some questions since he understood so well the topic we were discussing.[28]

Although this discomfort did not compel the men to stop me from chatting with the wives, they looked fidgety about the presence of a young man engaging their spouses in private conversations. In fact had I not been with the cultural broker, there is likelihood that the level of discomfort would have been higher. Probably, a female researcher may not have encountered this. The participants might have been more willing to share their experiences as they were likely to hold assumptions of a shared gender distinctiveness. This shared gender identity would have stimulated the informants to feel, "You are one of us and it is us versus them those on the outside who don't understand" (Dwyer and Buckle 2009:58).

Simply put, same gender interviewing would not only have provided the easy entrée into the interview situation, but would also have heightened the level of closeness, openness and trust; crucial for self-disclosure in interview settings. For example, borrowing from her own fieldwork experience among clergymen's wives Finch (1984:74) supports this thinking when she says: "Women are almost always enthusiastic about talking to a woman researcher, even if they have some initial anxieties about the purpose of the research or their own 'performance' in the interview situation".

However, although my "otherness' might have been on one hand an obstacle; it on the other hand might have been a plus. Having a shared identity with the informants might have given the informants a wrong impression that I understood their experiences well. With the 'she/he already knows these things' attitude, there was a possibility, that the informants would have failed to explain their individual experiences fully. My own perceptions were likely to be clouded by my

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[28]Apparently, as the informant disclosed to us, he was bothered that she (informant) was telling us how irresponsible the spouse was by not providing for his family. He spent all his salary drinking beer in bars in Kampala-Uganda's capital.

own personal experience making it difficult to 'erect a wall' between my own experiences and those of the participants (Dwyer and Buckle 2009). As a consequence, this could have resulted into an interview shaped, guided and influenced by the core aspects of my experience and not those of the participants. True, other weaknesses notwithstanding, my "otherness" allowed me to be more alert to occurrences in the field. Moreover "you don't have to be one to know one" (Fay 1996:2).

2.8 Moral and ethical concerns

The study balanced two values of social research: the pursuit of scientific knowledge and respect for the rights of those it studied. The key ethical issues wrapped under the rubric of informants' rights that this thesis keenly upheld include; privacy, access, confidentiality, informants' voluntary and informed consent, and anonymity.

To begin with, as mentioned earlier, almost all the interviews were conducted in the informants' homes. Two interviews were conducted inside the informants' huts or *Ot-lumas* due to rain. Thus in addition to the personal stories told by the women, I had also intruded into the informants' private space(s). Direct and personal involvement in the social lives of the informants during field research obligated me to maintain secrecy both of what I saw and had been told. Permission to enter a research setting for purposes of observing it or access to individuals for interviewing has to be obtained (Lofland and Lofland 1984). Approval to access research participants was sought first from the local leaders and gatekeepers. Once I was allowed physical access to the research area, permission was next sought from male spouses before talking to their wives.

Then, after giving comprehensive information about the overall purpose of the research as it concerned them, informants were asked for their consent to participate before the commencement of the interview. Also, like interviews, approval to make observations around their homes and take photographs of the features that caught my attention was sought before doing so.

More importantly, they were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the study any time they wished or even refrain from responding to any

questions they might have felt uncomfortable about. When asking for the informants' permission to record their interviews, I assured them that no one but me would ever use the research material that I collected and that the research material would be destroyed soon after the write-up of the thesis. Significant to recall is that since nearly all the informants lacked formal education, assents to interview them and make observations in and around their homes were given and secured verbally. Finally, to ensure anonymity, and as part of relinquishing some level of control to the participants, I asked informants to choose their own pseudonyms.[29] This approach encouraged the women to speak as they were assured that any public references to them would be disguised. The anonymity of the women featuring in the photographs in this thesis is ensured by blurring their features.

2.9 Summary

The chapter outlines choices regarding method and discusses main challenges. Kitgum was selected as a study location due to being an epicenter of war. I chose a qualitative method, applied interviews and observations as primary techniques for data collection, which were used to cross-check my findings. I heavily relied on a research assistant and cultural broker to gain access to women and general acceptance. Language is identified as one of the critical challenges as the cultural broker's translations of women's stories from Acholi language to English were seen to have caused a considerable loss of detail as well as probably distorting some meaning. Cultural and gender differences between me and those I sought to study, surfacing partly in male interferences in interview sessions with their female partners necessitated both discussions and reflections on my positionality as a fieldworker from one ethnic cultural group researching another through cross-gender interviewing. Finally, I highlight how the need for balancing the pursuit of scientific knowledge and respect for the women that participated in the study necessitated taking into consideration ethical practices of conducting research.

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[29] See the pseudonyms in chapter four serving informant anonymity.

Chapter 3: Conceptual framework

"A conceptual framework is something that is constructed, not found. It incorporates pieces that are borrowed from elsewhere, but the structure, the overall coherence, is something that you build, not something that exists ready-made" (Maxwell 2013:41).

This chapter attempts a conceptual framework to the study about how and what women do in order to hold their "worlds" together in the post-war Kitgum District of northern Uganda. From a gender lens, the chapter privileges the use of the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) as a tool through which women's survival experiences are conceptualized and explained. The term 'gender' refers to the socially constructed differences between men and women as distinct from 'sex' which refers to their biological differences (Bogaert 2012). The choice and decision to use the framework from a gender perspective is based on the understanding that: the acquisition, ownership, access to and use of the SLA's capitals (to be explained later) in pursuit of livelihoods is gendered despite the Framework's silence about this reality. For example, in Uganda, while men often acquire 'use' and management rights over assets, just to cite land as an example, through inheritance, marriage is the most common way for women to gain access to land. Gender and violent conflict impact livelihoods in different ways. Drawing on the framework's capitals' components, a discussion of how the two variables interact to influence women's survival mechanisms will be given.

Concepts of empowerment and agency will also be explored as these are crucial in enhancing our understanding of women's ability to keep both their body and soul together after war. Also, the choice of these two concepts is underlined by two factors: (i) the inadequacy of the extant framework to explain what is going on with the phenomenon that we want to understand (Maxwell 2013) and (ii) notions of the concepts' recurrence during the course of interviews with informants. Writing in 1967, Glaser and Strauss cited in Maxwell (2013) observed that theory that is in position to illuminate the phenomenon under investigation is one that is inductively developed during a study and in constant interaction with the data from the study.

3.1 Defining a livelihood

Although the concept of a "livelihood" is extensively used in contemporary studies especially those involving poverty and rural development, its precise meaning has remained elusive, either due to; vagueness or diverse definitions encountered in different sources (Ellis 2000). For

instance, Carswell *et al* (1997:10) cited in Scoones (1998:5) state that: 'definitions of sustainable livelihoods are often unclear, inconsistent and relatively narrow. Without clarification, there is a risk of simply adding to a conceptual muddle…" A popular definition, widely quoted in livelihoods studies that this thesis adopts, is that provided by Chambers and Conroy's (1991:6) [30] who state that:

"A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base".

To understand better how human beings initiate, develop and sustain livelihoods, building on the work of practitioners and academics, the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) developed the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF). Although the Framework does not present a model of reality, nonetheless it is useful for understanding a number of factors that both affect and influence a person's livelihood.

3.2 The sustainable livelihood approach explained

The Livelihoods Framework, Figure 2 is centered on people in general (this is one of its weaknesses as will be seen later) and identifies five [31] main types of capitals sometimes referred to as assets that humans make use of for their survival. These assets are the building blocks upon which humans are able to undertake production, engage in labour markets and participate in reciprocal relationships with others for their well-being (Ellis 2000). The SLA has since its emergence towards the end of the 1980's (Solesbury 2003) been mainly used by international development bodies to derive sustainable means of fighting rural poverty (Korf 2003). I employed it here as an analytical structure to assist in enhancing our understanding of the different survival strategies that women in societies ravaged by complex political emergencies are likely to make use of so as to meet their everyday gendered needs.

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[30]Chambers and Conroy modified this definition from the one coined and contained in a report by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WECD 1987a).

[31]Odero (2006) proposes the sixth asset-information, though this is not included here.
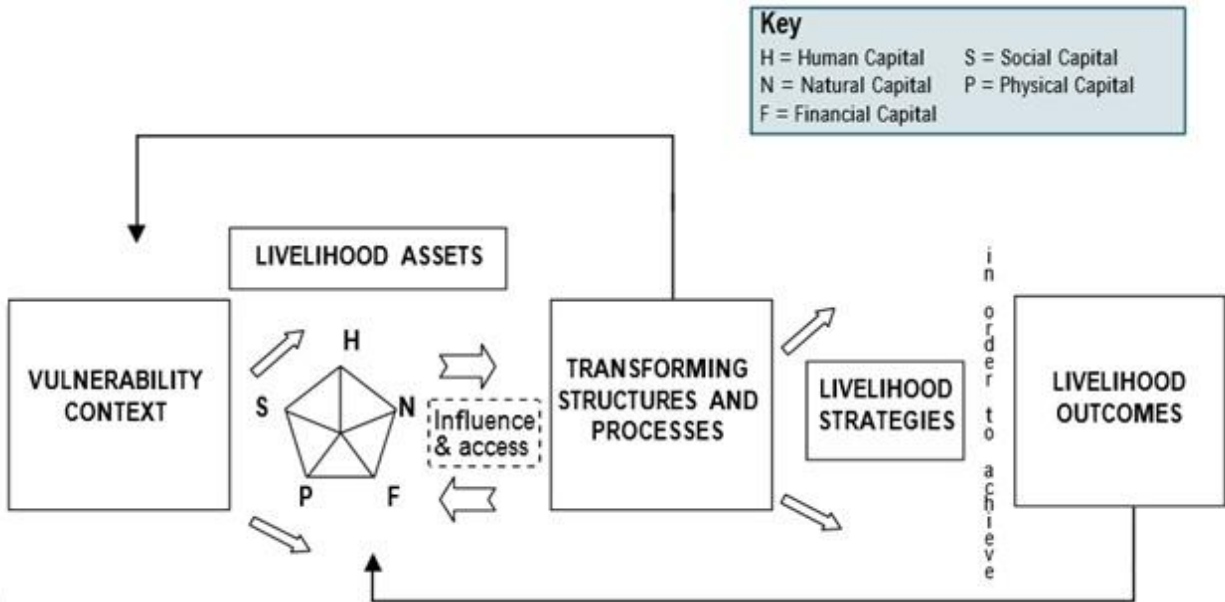
Figure 2: The Sustainable Livelihood Framework. **Source: (DFID 1999)**

The SLA is a huge framework. It is therefore beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a detailed review or description of its components. What follows is simply a concise listing of the important components of the framework as depicted in Figure 2.

Vulnerability context: This includes the shocks such as; war, climate change, trends, and seasonality that affect livelihoods, usually negatively. The local communities have no control over the vulnerability context at least in the near or medium-term.

*Livelihood assets***:** The assets or capitals on which livelihoods are constructed.

Transforming Structures and Processes: These constitute the complex array of; social cultural, political and institutional factors which affect livelihoods. Unlike the vulnerability context, such TSPs are continually shaped by people.

Livelihood strategies: These are the range and combination(s) of choices and activities that people make in order to pursue and achieve livelihood outcomes.

Livelihood outcomes: The achievements that include but are not limited to; increased income, greater well-being; reduced vulnerability; improved food security, good social relations and others resulting from the livelihood strategies. Though negative outcomes sometimes occur, the goal, however, is to achieve positive outcomes only.

As earlier mentioned, the SL framework places people at the centre of a web of inter-related influences that affect how these people create a livelihood for themselves and their households (FDID 1999). This may be due to the belief that through reason, [and rational planning-my addition], a unique quality that humans possess as Aristotle observed, [32] then people as active players in the process of change can, by using the capitals mentioned, cause transformations that will lift them from poverty to development. While the focus on people rather than the resources they use may be one of the SLA's core strength, this 'general people concern', might as well be a weakness. This is because it ignores what Rawls [33] called the 'difference principle' (Alexander 2008). I am persuaded to believe that treating people as an undifferentiated whole, overlooks other variables that further define and differentiate them. There is little doubt that people differ from one another in so many ways.

Gender, a key variable at the center of this thesis about which the framework is loudly silent, is one such basis of this distinction. Others include but are not limited to; age, marital status, caste, race, skills, physical abilities and talents. The tool's failure to recognize what may be called the "gender difference variable", equally translates into a failure to acknowledge that women and men have different resources available to them in crisis situations, and will turn to different strategies for survival (Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2006). Therefore, it is crucial to factor in these differences when analyzing men's and women's *access* to resources as well as their potential to convert the assets or primary goods into viable livelihoods outcomes.

3.3 Gender, war and livelihoods: teasing out the connection

Explaining the diverse roles assets play, Bebbington (1999:2022) writes: "assets are vehicles for' instrumental action (making a living), hermeneutic action (making a living meaningful) and emancipatory action (challenging the structures under which one makes a living)". Borrowing from Amartya Sen's capability theory, Bebbington adds: "assets, give people the capability to be and to act".

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[32]http://www.quodlibet.net/articles/haslip-aristotle.shtml [Accessed 18.December.2013].

[33]Rawls, J. Bordley was an American philosopher and a leading figure in moral and political philosophy. It is in his *A Theory of Justice* that he talks about the *difference principle*

Despite this acknowledgment of assets' significance in shaping the means of living that humans lead, there is ample evidence about gender differences in the distribution of assets, entitlements, as well as the gendered division of activities (Beneria and Feldman 1992; Deere and Doss 2006). What this means is that when covariant shocks[34] such as armed conflict occur, those with fewer resources especially women- a social group still disproportionately represented among the world's poorest (Alber 2009) will be the most vulnerable and hit the hardest. This increases their vulnerability by frustrating their abilities to secure the necessities of life. Drawing on the Framework's assets' component, I attempt to theorize the gender, war and livelihoods nexus.

3.3.1 Human capital

Human capital is embodied in the individual. This asset category is perhaps the most important of all and can be two dimensional. I have labeled these dimensions-software and hardware.[35] The former relates to knowledge and skills acquired mainly through education, while the latter relates to the physical human body that is in good health and therefore able to work on and transform the other forms of capital for a living. Disappointingly, in times of armed crises, schooling; a major pathway to imparting knowledge and skills is usually disrupted as teachers flee to safer zones for their lives. Educational facilities are either intentionally vandalized by rebel groups because of their association with government or deteriorate due to neglect.

Fearing that children's lives may be at risk of rape or conscription into rebel ranks on their way to and from education centers, parents are likely to withdraw their children from school. In such atmospheres full of fear and uncertainty, educational opportunities for children, especially girls (assumed to be more at risk than boys) are often slim. Also, constrained with resources, girl child education may rank at the bottom of the parents' scale of preferenc[36] as parents will preferentially enroll only boys while girls stay at home to assist their mothers with domestic chores and other activities. It is not surprising as Mazurana *et al* (2008) show that in northern

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[34]Covariant shocks are shocks that affect groups of households, regions or even entire countries. Examples could include, armed violence, financial crisis, changes in food prices, drought and others.

[35] This is my own categorization.

[36]An economic concept meaning a list of unsatisfied wants arranged in the order of their relative importance. The list shows the order in which a rational consumer wants to satisfy his/her wants arranged in order of priority. In the scale of preference, the most pressing wants come first and the least pressing ones come last. It is after the first and most pressing need(s) on the list has been satisfied that there will be room for the satisfaction of the next.

Uganda one-in-five female youth have no education, and only one-in-three are functionally literate. As the war ends, women, compared to men are already ill-prepared to participate in the labour markets arising from postwar reconstruction. Resultantly, more women than men are pushed to live on the margins of society. On the contrary, those who might have been lucky to have some elementary education might find it easy to get jobs. For instance, a returnee Nuer woman of South Sudan happily says, *"I have my diplomas and a bit of education. This is the reason I got a job with IRC. For us returnee women, who know something, are a bit educated, it is easier to get job"* (Grabska 2013: 1150).

Concerning the hardware component of human capital, wars frequently 'strike a blow' at public health systems through the destruction of health infrastructure, loss of skilled personnel, and reductions in government spending (Iqbal 2006). Also, a lack of access to maternity care and decreased food security as indicated by a higher average prevalence of undernourishment in wartime and postwar periods are likely to result in increased infant mortality rates (Brück and Vothknecht 2011).This means that the mothers' weak physical bodies undermine their ability to work in a harsh war-torn environment that requires both good health and resilience. Both men and women suffer from physical violence during war that compromises their potential for survival. However, women's centrality to the economic survival of the household (Beneria and Feldman 1992) exacerbates their vulnerability when subject to violence that curtails their ability to work and live on their own. For example, the two decades war in northern Uganda, resulted in many women losing the use of their limbs due to landmines or gunshot wounds. Others were mutilated by rebels and sustained injuries in fires (*such as Adokora,* Section *1.6*). Thus, until recently, it was not uncommon to see adult females from Karamoja and the war torn region of northern Uganda, trafficking children to Kampala city streets to beg for handouts from motorists and pedestrians in order to survive.

3.3.2 Social and financial capital(s)

Social capital, one of the trendiest terms used in livelihoods studies, has attracted many meanings. According to Farr (2004), social capital is *"complexly conceptualized as the network of associations, activities, or relations that bind people together as a community via certain norms and psychological capacities, notably trust which are essential for civil society and*

productive of future collective action or goods, in a manner of other forms of capital." Financial capital on the other hand denotes the stocks of cash either borrowed from friends, relatives or accumulated through one's own savings and used to procure production or consumption goods (DFID 1999; Ellis 2000). From the women's perspective, especially rural illiterate women, social and financial capitals are strongly intertwined.

For poor rural illiterate women who do not own land- a major form of collateral[37] they will resort to negotiate access to financial capital, through social networks, membership of and affiliations to groups and participation in associational activities. Yet, connections, group membership, and relationships of trust, reciprocity, and exchanges that provide for important safety nets can be severely disrupted and exhausted both during and after war (Jon 2008). Swift (1996) makes a similar claim as Jon when he notes that, social capital, one of the bases for survival in many African rural societies is being deliberately targeted by many of the counter-insurgency warfare and often becomes one of the first casualties of civil war.

However, Deng (2010) notes that this assumption is too simplistic. He observes that it is the nature of warfare that determines whether or not social capital will be fractured. Where violence is perpetrated by 'endogenous actors,' neighbors and relatives will be pitted against each other thereby severing internal group cohesion through loss of trust and cooperation. On the other hand, where a community is exposed to external common war threats, members act cohesively to defeat the threat. They also support each other in their struggle for survival. Far from being weakened by war, social capital has a very crucial facet to it: the way it is mobilized.

Social capital in many communities (especially rural ones) is mediated through cultural rules, norms and practices that guide people's behavior in their daily social encounters. These rules and norms give some actors power-the ability of some actors to influence the behavior of others whether through the use of persuasion, authority, or coercion (Ryle 2012) and privilege over others. It is the women that are on the receiving end of the consequences of the hegemonic

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[37]Most if not all financial institutions in Uganda require that those seeking for financial services in form of loans, mortgage their land-an asset the most poor rural women neither own nor control. Sometimes cattle/goats may be used as mortgage, but again these are mostly owned by men.

masculine powers that relegate them to living what Foucault (1977:182) may call a life of "subordination and docility", while men so conspicuously enjoy a *laissez faire* one.

Living a subjugated lifestyle means that women's social spaces will be controlled through having their acquaintances and groups vetted. Also, time spent out with those outside of the immediate relations, the place(s) to go and issues to discuss among others have to be carefully scrutinized and sanctioned by those that wield power-the men. In many instances, a female's mission outside the home has to answer five W's; who, what, where, why, and when. In my own family, for instance, girls were never sent for shopping in the trading centers except only when all the boys were away running other errands. Even when girls were sent out, they were escorted by a younger sibling and had to return home before dusk. From the above, we can conclude that in societies with deep roots of patriarchy that relegate women to a 'minor' status, even before war sets in, women are already in a poor position to negotiate and accumulate social capital.

3.3.3 Natural capital

Natural capital includes natural resources such as land, water and trees that are utilized by human populations for their survival (Ellis 2000). Studies reveal that large populations in societies ravaged by conflicts[38] derive a very big portion of their livelihoods from natural resource based enterprises that comprise of farming, fishing, hunting, gathering in woodlands and forests, mineral extraction(s) and others. Nature is portrayed as feminine[39] and women are often thought of and said to be closer to nature than men (Eduards 1994). The connection between women and how they relate more closely to the environment than men do is perhaps well illustrated in Boserup's (1970) seminal work, *Women's Role in Economic Development*, in which she shows that women's work input in African agriculture-an enterprise that is inextricably tailored to nature, by far exceeded that of men. In her study of how households cope with seasonality, drought and famine in south Asia, (Agarwal cited in Beneria and Feldman 1992), describes women as the main foragers and gatherers with valuable reserve knowledge of edible forest produce, which can help tide poor families over prolonged seasonal shortages.

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[38]Natural resources have been shown to play a major role both motivating and fuelling armed conflicts that have plagued a number of African countries. Not only are the rewards from the exploitation of natural resources used for immediate sustenance of livelihoods, but also for building political support. As a result, they have become obstacles to peace as leaders of armed groups involved in extraction are unwilling to give up control over these resources.
[39]For instance the use of metaphorical language as 'Mother Earth' in reference to nature.

From my own lived experience in Uganda, women as well as men are involved in product extraction from the 'commons'. These products range from firewood, papyrus reeds, medicinal herbs, mushrooms and many others. The products gathered by both sexes may not differ that much but at least men and women have differed in their reason(s) for gathering. Men have for the most part extracted these resources for cash to meet their own individual needs. On the other hand, because women have dual responsibilities placed on them—to provide care and to provide income, their intention(s) for resource extraction is for the household economy/domestic consumption as well as the market economy for cash for use in the purchase of those necessities that cannot be obtained through forest product extraction.

Violent conflict, however, disrupts the above human activities and displaces civilian populations from their communities, thus hindering them from harvesting resources from the natural environment for their life sustenance. Lautze (2006) notes that the infamous Lord's Resistance Army's attacks since 1991 on women working in their fields and the subsequent mutilation of ears, lips and breasts were among other reasons meant to serve as caution to others who would risk cultivating.

Alienation of women from the natural environment-a fundamental base of their survival through the use of violence against them, leads to reduced access to agricultural production, thereby increasing levels of hunger and malnutrition and increases people's dependence on relief supplies provided by humanitarian agencies. Sadly these supplies, more often, are unreliable both in quantity and regularity (El-Bushara and Sahl 2005). In such circumstances, both men and women may become more dependent on casual employment, such as in bars or on self-employment in petty trade and commercial sex (ibid) and other 'tolerated illegalities'[40] just to use (Foucault's 1977) dictum.

The foregoing seems to suggest that in the complicated trajectories of war and violence, women are on the losing end. The literature on war and gender movingly brings a new dimension to this

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[40]In the sense that confronted with a lack of an alternative(s), women may be compelled to engage in these illegalities that eventually become socially acceptable as necessary survival strategies.

thinking. Wartime violence provides a window of opportunity for women to emerge from the backyard as resourceful and resilient champions of hope in the aftermath. What a paradox! These 'gains 'that emerge out of the 'losses' occasioned by protracted conflict are embedded in two interrelated concepts of "empowerment" and "agency" that this thesis draws upon.

3.4 Empowerment

For quite some time now, the concept of 'empowerment' has been employed as a buzzword in the contemporary development discourse. Recently, however, its use has broadened to cover many quarters of our lives including the area (s) of criminology (Pollack 2008), education (Hughes 1998), health and therapeutic programs (Chamberlin 1997). It most especially has been used in studies about marginalized groups such as; indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, women and the poor. Despite the wide usage of the term, there seems to be little consistency in how it is both defined and understood. As Young (1994:48) states, "everyone is for it, but rarely do people mean the same thing by it." The concept has numerous connotations:

"Having decision-making power, having access to information and resources, having a range of options from which to make choices (not just yes/no, either/or), assertiveness, a feeling that the individual can make a difference (being hopeful),learning to think critically; unlearning the conditioning; seeing things differently; e.g., a) learning to redefine who we are (speaking in our own voice), b) learning to redefine what we can do, c) learning to redefine our relationships to institutionalized power, learning about and expressing anger, not feeling alone; feeling part of a group, understanding that people have rights, effecting change in one's life and one's community, learning skills (e.g., communication) that the individual defines as important, changing others' perceptions of one's competency and capacity to act, coming out of the closet., growth and change that is never ending and self-initiated, increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming stigma" (Chamberlin 1997: 48).

One feature that seems to be echoed both by scholars and practitioners in the human services is that when those who are/were intended to be empowered express the readiness and capacity to exercise choice in a manner considered meaningful to them, then empowerment has taken place. An influential scholar of gender justice Naila Kabeer for instance conceives of empowerment in terms of the "expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them. Strategic choices are those life choices such as choice of a livelihood, where to live, whether to marry, who to marry, whether to have children, how many children to have, freedom of movement and choice of friends which people think are critical for

them to live the lives they want" (Kabeer 2001:19). Empowerment can be at the individual as well as collective level.

But a key question to ask is: how does empowerment occur and what are the conduits through which it is stimulated? Is it through education and training or access to resources such as money? If so, what explanation(s) do we give for educated women who earn salaries that are controlled and managed by their male partners?[41] The pathways to empowerment seem to be unclear as is the meaning of the concept itself. In the 'war and gender" debate (which is my main concern), women's empowerment is depicted as majorly stimulated through; (i) the public sphere that women occupy after war's upheaval has denuded the villages of the men when they join soldiery or death and (ii) the patriarchal gender relations that undergo significant transformation during wartime. In the absence of men, writes Turshen (1998), women take painful steps forward: they begin to transform traditional gender roles as they assume men's former tasks; they gain public spaces previously denied; even achieve a degree of economic independence.

Under the harsh conditions of civil conflict, women demonstrate an ability to transform their lives. In changing women's gender roles, war provides opportunities for some women to emerge as leaders".[42] Turshen's observation that war produces 'heroines' who elbow their way out of the private realm to the public arena and also venture into domains of life formerly considered 'no-go-areas' for them (suggestive of disempowerment), seems to correlate so well with that of Kabeer who powerfully notes that the "notion of empowerment is inescapably bound up with the condition of disempowerment- a process by which those who were denied the ability to make choices, now acquire such an ability" (2001:19).

It can thus be said that the journey from violence to peace is an empowering one through which women (though not all of them) emerge with a new sense of their own capabilities and the strength to reinvent the institutions of social life in order to confront the dynamics of the aftermath.

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[41]I know of female teachers who earn monthly incomes (salaries) but never make decisions on how/what to spend their money on.
[42]More on this see Azza (2000).

3.5 Agency

The concept of agency is said to be both a component as well as an expansion of empowerment. To use Farr's (2004:9) maxim, it is a 'conceptual cousin' of empowerment. Also, like empowerment, the theory of agency seems to have attracted multiple meanings and definitions. Consider for instance, political philosopher and feminist Martha Nussbaum (2000) understands it to mean *practical reason and control over one's environment*. Narayan *et al* (2000b) refer to it as *freedom of choice and action,* and Sen (1992) says *what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important.* Kabeer (1999: 438) for her part explains agency as meaning "the ability to define one's goals and act upon them".

Thus, we infer that having a sense of agency, includes the consciousness that one is initiating, executing and more importantly volitionally controlling one's own actions and affairs. "Agency has both positive and negative meanings in relation to power. In a positive sense of the 'power to', it refers to people's capacity to define their own life-choices and to pursue their own goals, even in the face of opposition from others". On the other hand in the more negative sense of 'power over', it means the "capacity of an actor or category of actors to override the agency of others for instance through the use of violence, coercion and threat" (ibid 438).

In post-war environments, women strive to exercise their agency in the positive sense by resisting [43] male use of dominance and repression to subjugate and bar them from enjoying the gains made during turbulent times. They do this in many ways including lobbying and demanding to participate in policy making such as the women in Haiti did when 300, 000 of them demonstrated in the streets of Port-au-Prince on 3rd April 1986 with a simple and clear demand: 'We want to be present in all areas of decision making. Policy will no longer be made without us" (Merlet 2001: 169).

Key forces behind such forms of agency expression may include stressful life events (Gutierrez (1994) and new experiences, or special challenges confronted (Hart 1996) as well as exposure to different ways of life and new skills (El-Bushara 2010) gained during or after war. In order to be

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[43] According to Kabeer (1999) resistance, protests, bargaining [and lobbying-my addition] are some of the ways through agency can be exercised.

able to act on their goals they must be aware of the forces and structures working to their disadvantage. The process of women gaining awareness of such power structures and institutions that 'hold them back' and the consequent wish to change them is, according to Strandberg often referred to as conscientisation or awareness raising (2002:5) a concept often attributed to Freire (1970) and later used by feminist scholars. Freire for instance claimed that through conscientisation processes those who have been completely marginalized become radically transformed and are no longer willing to be mere objects, responding to changes occurring around them. Instead they decide to take upon themselves the struggle to change the structures of society, which until now have served to oppress them.

3.6 When war 'takes and gives' back

The image of women (and girls particularly in non-egalitarian communities-my addition) in the iconography of war, is that of the eternal victim, passive and without agency (Manchanda 2001). They suffer the consequences of war more than the men do. Conflict-related disruption of schooling seems to affect girls more than boys, as suggested by a decreasing ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary education (Brück and Vothknecht 2011:107). At family level, faced with economic constraints, daughters' education becomes the opportunity cost[44] of wartime expenditure. With the insistence on the implementation of neoliberal policies by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, which among others call for reduced state expenditure on the provision of public goods including health, when war undermines the public health system,[45] more women than men, bear the brunt of the damage.

War leads to death of beloved ones, loss of home, and family/community dislocation. This is in addition to the tearing apart of social capital especially when violence perpetrators are from within the community (Deng 2010) such as it happened during the 1994 Rwandan genocide in which neighbors were pitted against one another (Fujii 2009) with women bearing more the brunt of this catastrophe (Twagiramariya and Turshen 1998). As has been shown, war virtually dents almost all livelihoods assets-human, social, financial, natural and physical. This ruin is felt more by those in a weaker position-almost always women. Although war inflicts loss and

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[44]An alternative forgone, in a situation where choice needs to be made between several mutually exclusive alternatives given a limited purse of resources.
[45]See (Brück and Vothknecht 2011:105-107) on the impact of war on the health of women and girls.

destitution, it on the other hand also opens up intended and unintended spaces from which women make and even negotiate gains. In other words, in terms of war's implication(s) for women, war engenders a phenomenon that I term *dual-effect* as demonstrated in the figure below.

Environment
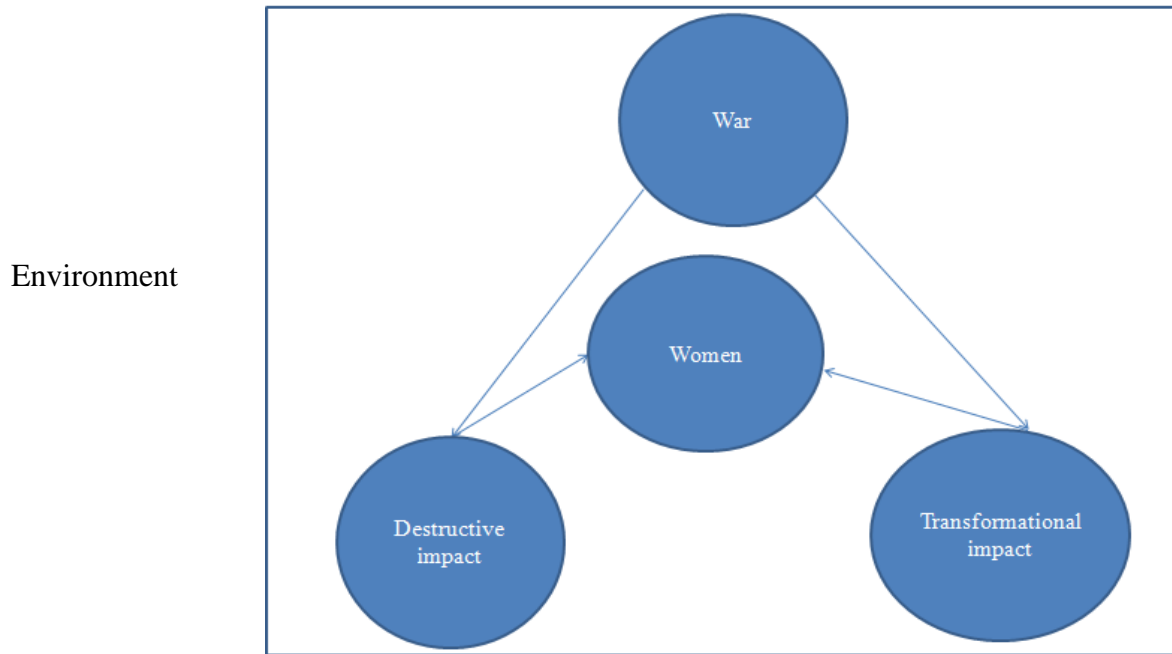
Figure 3: *War's dualistic impact on women*

Concept: *By Santo Asiimwe, the researcher*

In the concept map above, I postulate that war has two polar extremes- the negative one denoted by war's destructive character (left) and its variant-the positive, represented by the transformational impact (right) that war brings forth to the women. Herein is a paradox. Armed conflict's 'transformational dividend' for women has its starting point in its disruptive nature. Protracted conflict first poses a threat to humanity in general as it annihilates the livelihoods assets and amplifies the vulnerability of those without (or with less) social, political and economic power-women. In a dramatic turn, war destroys the unequal power relations that previously promoted male supremacy and control and female subjugation and meekness. By so doing, war opens up spaces through which women make a breakthrough as empowered actors with agency ready to confront post-war burdens of social, political and livelihoods reconstruction.

3.7 Summary

The chapter has charted the theoretical framework of this study. It has drawn on the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA); a tool though largely used in poverty studies was found useful in illuminating the problem under study: female livelihoods in communities blown apart by armed violence. Based on Chambers and Conroy's work, a definition of a livelihood was offered and the SLA's components outlined. I stated that the SLA generally places people at the centre of a web of inter-related influences that affect how these people create livelihoods for themselves. This general focus on people, I argued, ignores the fact that people are different based on a number of variables including gender.

This difference in particular the gender difference(s) have implications for how men and women survive in the face of war given that they have asymmetrical powers over access to and control over livelihood assets. Following this observation, I offered that when analyzing people's access to resources and their potential to convert assets into viable livelihoods, it is vital to factor in the 'gender difference variable'. This was followed by a discussion about the relationship between war, gender and livelihoods. More specifically, drawing on the SLA's assets framework, I showed that war in combination with other factors such as; women's limited accessibility to resources compared to men, women's restricted mobility, and general powerlessness due to the institution(s) of patriarchy,[46] constrains women's capability to manage survival. War presents difficulty for women. In this difficulty, however, lies the opportunity for gains that are wrapped in the highlighted concepts of empowerment and agency.

This means that as war 'takes away', in a way, it also 'gives back'. In other words, while war destroys, it also transforms the women, a phenomenon that I termed *war's dual-effect on women.* But how does war, a force that compromises women's potential for organizing and managing their welfare again transform, empower and enable them to emerge as agents capable of taking

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[46]A social system in which males are the main authority figures central to social organization, occupying positions of political leadership, moral authority, and control of property. Also fathers hold power over women and children. It implies the institutions of male rule and privilege, and entails female subordination. Many patriarchal societies are also patrilineal, meaning that property and title are inherited by the male lineage.

charge of their own lives? These questions are explored in the chapter that follows: data presentation and analysis; one that seeks to show whether there is dialogue between theory and the empirical data gathered during fieldwork.

Chapter 4: Presentation and analysis of field data

In this chapter, I explore how women in war-ravaged Kitgum District forge a livelihood for themselves and others under their care. The aim is to show which kinds of economic activities women drew upon before, during and after the war to sustain their households and how these activities, along with how their gender roles changed. I start with an overview of the pre and post-war socio-economic conditions in Acholiland, offering a general picture of livelihood opportunities. Thereafter I use the qualitative data collected from the informants to give insight into individual and diverse livelihood opportunities and strategies. The chapter also discusses the role of age and marital status, number of children and dependants and how these features influence livelihood choices and activities.

My purpose is to show that despite how hard and challenging life might have been more particularly during and after violent conflict, women did not passively sit back. I explore how women used old as well as new resources in order to survive, sometimes opting for work not only considered hazardous but also unfit for them as women. I argue that the difficult times women went through motivated them to; adopt proactive roles, discover their hidden potential, exercise their agency and transform their lives. However, not all the women experienced these gains.

4.1 Socio-economic livelihood structures in Acholiland

Before the civil war broke out towards the end of the 1980's, Acholiland was endowed with good flourishing vegetation, game animals, and birds and above all, plentiful fertile land which was communally owned and handed down by fathers to their sons. Though Northern Uganda's fertile arable land made up to 87.4% of the total land by 1999 when war was at its peak, less than 10% of the land was being utilized (COWI 1999). This may mainly be attributed to war's displacement of the people and their concentration in protected villages (Dolan 2009). Successful agricultural production was made possible because the region had a well linked network of roads and railways that enabled transporting agricultural products to meet the market demand (Owona 2008). Sadly, due to war, infrastructure was either deliberately destroyed or fell to neglect. Ochega, (pseudonym) a retired Social Studies teacher who I spoke to in a casual conversation elaborates this picture of Acholiland: *We were rich people. It is this war that made us poor. We*

are mainly farmers growing crops for our own home use, although sometimes we sell some. We also keep some animals as our sources of livelihood", Ochega added. The major crops include sorghum, millet, cassava and simsim.[47] Cotton, tobacco, coffee and maize were largely cash crops although maize was grown for subsistence as well.

Changing times and circumstances seem to have led to the waning of division of labour as it was in the past, Achega said: *only men cut/slashed the bushes to prepare land for digging. But nowadays, women can also slash the bushes.* Though men and women also seem to grow similar crops, Ochega said that commonly, women grow vegetables around the home for domestic consumption. Ochega's claim that nowadays men and women grow similar crops though with some differences seems to contradict the widely held view that in Africa, men and women specialize in different crops (Udry 1996).

Like many communities in rural Africa, the Acholi people did not solely rely on agricultural production. They supplemented this primary livelihood enterprise with wide-scale ownership of short-horned cattle. Cattle were used for ploughing and a source of wealth. In Acholiland, bride price was traditionally paid in terms of cows. Until the LRA broke out, cattle were owned in large numbers and would be sold to support family needs. [48] Due to a conducive environment for agricultural production, a tradition of cattle and livestock ownership and being a hard working community, famine was unheard of in the Acholi community. In addition, the Acholi were excellent hunters. Their prey enriched the daily menu. They hunted either as a group or alone as trappers using nets, pits, or hunted the animals into the water and subsequently killed them with their spears (Owona 2008). However, due to war, wider processes of 'modernization', and the constraints to life in the protected villages, this activity which had always been a component of Acholi livelihoods and a proof of masculinity reduced considerably (Dolan 2009).

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[47]Also called sesame indicum is an oilseed (small) crop widely grown in northern Uganda. It forms a big part of Acholi people diet.

[48] On the symbolic, social and economic significance of cattle and the implications for its decimation during the war for Acholi people see (Finnström 2008:71-74).

The Acholi people long realized that educating their children was fundamental for the development of their community (Owona 2008). Parents embraced education with utmost dedication and encouraged their children to enter many professions, although more boys than girls were sent to school. Disturbingly, fieldwork interviews revealed this inimical practice that subjects the girl child to having unequal chances to schooling with her boy counterpart continues. Girls remain at home or are de-enrolled from school in order to care for the young and the sick when their mothers are away or to provide additional labour in all sorts of work including land cultivation. In practice girls are trained and prepared early enough for what may be termed the "multiple or triple roles of reproductive, productive and community work (UNDP 2002).

Among the Acholi, education was not seen only in formal terms. Informal education that consists of cultural values was passed from generation to generation through oral tradition that encompassed the entire social setting. Cultural values included respect for humanity, charity, dances, courtship, marriage, hard work, morals, and love of one's community (Owona 2008).

With improved security since 2006 the government of Uganda together with local and international partners financed and implemented massive peace-building and livelihood reconstruction intervention (Birner, Cohen and Ilukor 2011). These include programs such as the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP) and the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) highlighted earlier in chapter one which I found had little relevance to the women I interviewed.

Having given a general image of how the Acholi people lived before the northern Uganda violent conflict, next I present the empirical data collected from the field using qualitative interviews and observation methods. I commence the task of data presentation by first giving an overview on the demographic variables of informants. As indicated in Table 1, these variables comprise of age, marital status, and number of children, other dependants in the household. Included also, is the level of education and the nature livelihoods activities that the informants were involved with before, during and after the war. As will be shown in the discussion, these characteristics seemed

to play a big role in relation to how the women planned and organized their households' wellbeing.

Table 1: INFORMANTS: AN OVERVIEW

Pseudonym	Age	Marital Status	No. of Children	Other Dependants	Level of Education	Pre-war Livelihood Activity	War time Livelihood Sources	Post-war Livelihood Activity
Anyadwe	21	Married	2	-	Primary 7	Tailoring/sewing	-	Smallholder (Also, brews ajono and owns a small shop)
Megalonyo	72	Widow	10	-	Primary 2	Cattle keeping/Smallholding	Remittances from children abroad	Crocheting/Knitting hats
Lamwaka	57	Married	8	2	Primary 3	Smallholding	Collecting & selling firewood	Quarrying/smallholding
Akumu	32	Widow	6	7	Primary 4	Cattle keeping/Smallholding	-	Smallholder
Lanyero	28	Divorced	4	-	No class	Smallholding	-	Smallholder
Abey	22	Single mother	1	-	Senior 3	*	-	*
Amony	43	Married	5	2	Primary 4	Smallholding/poultry	Selling wild vegetables in camp	Smallholder/poultry
Anenochan	33	Widow	5	-	Primary 3	Smallholding	-	Waged labour/Smallholder
Pinoloya	30	Married	4	1	Primary 6	Smallholding	-	Smallholder/Piggery
Adyero	50	Widow	5	2	Primary 7	Smallholding	-	Smallholder
Lawino	32	Married	**5**	1	Primary 7	Smallholding	-	Smallholder
Lamara	30	Married	5	5	Primary 7	Smallholding	Selling wild pawpaw in camp	Smallholder/Waged labour
Aol	28	Married	4	4	Senior 1	Smallholding	-	Smallholder/shop keeping
Abur	30	Married	2	2	Primary 7	Smallholding	-	Smallholder
Aciro	29	Married	5	2	Primary 6	Smallholding	-	Waged labour/gathering and selling firewood
Aceng	29	Widow	2	1	Primary 2	Local beer (Ajono) brewing	Beer/Ajono brewing	Charcoal burning/smallholding
Akello	46	Widow	9	3	Teachers' College	Teaching	Teaching	Civil service/Other businesses e.g vending in the market

4.2. Demographic features and their influence on livelihoods

4.2.1 Age and marital status

Age and marital status were seen to have an influence on both the type of livelihood activities that individual women undertook as well as their freedom to exercise independence in terms of resource use. As seen in Table 1, seventeen women were selected for the study. They were aged between 21 and 72 with most of them in their late 20's and early 30's. Nine informants were married. One was a single mother, six were widows; some lost their spouses due to war while other deaths were as a result of natural illnesses. However, one of those who said was a widow had been inherited by her in-law; a brother to her deceased husband. Asked further whether she considered herself re-married or widow, she seemed unsure in which category she fell. For the purpose of this study, she was categorized as a widow since her 'new' spouse spent most of his time with his other wife. She had this to say when asked whether her new spouse assisted her with gardening and other activities:

> *No, we don't work together because he has his first wife with whom he stays much*
> *of the time, though he supports me in many other ways.*

Only one respondent was a divorcee. She had returned to her parents' home at the time of the interview. The impact of the natural process of aging and health and its implication for choice of livelihood activity is highlighted by 72 year old Megalonyo who formerly concentrated on simsim[49] growing; an activity that demanded a strong and healthy body, but now knits hats. This is something she can do while sitting in one position. She told me:

> *I started knitting when I felt I could not afford doing work that required me to stand all the*
> *time. My children… can't you see I am old? Also, I am diabetic. So I need to do simple*
> *work.*

Marital status had an influence on many aspects of women's lives as they struggled to search for a means to live. For some, being abandoned or neglected by their male spouses gave them a chance to plan for their money and spend it with no spousal interference "*I work, earn and plan for my money without anyone interfering*" said Anyadwe who is apparently abandoned by her

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[49] Also called sesame or *esamum indicum*) is a flowering plant that produces small edible seeds which grow in pods. It is drought-tolerant and is able to grow where other crops fail.

husband now living in Kitgum town with another wife. As will be seen later, for Aceng, the burdens of widowhood compelled her to engage in masculine work. She cuts trees and burns charcoal for a living. However, in a way, this widowhood seems to have accorded her the opportunity to exercise her agency. *"I am free. I do what I want with no one imposing their orders on me,* she stated. For other women such as Lanyero (see section 4.6.2) being divorced by her abusive spouse makes her life extremely difficult. Running away with children, she leaves behind all the wealth and accumulation she contributed to. *"I have nothing"* she declares.

4.2.2 Children and other dependants

Data indicate the crucial role of women, not only as breadwinners, but also in taking care of their own children as well as providing for other children and adults dependent on them. Six informants had five children each, three had four children each, and another three had two children each. One of the informants in her early 70's had ten children; all of them were independent adults and most of these are now living abroad. One informant had eight children and another had six. Only one informant (a single mother) had one child. Out of the seventeen women interviewed, twelve reported having other dependants living under their immediate care in addition to their own biological children.

Although five informants reported not having any dependants living with them under the same roof, nonetheless, they hinted about shouldering responsibility for supporting them where they lived. Most of these dependants were children whose parents were dead or who due to war, had become physically or psychologically disabled and were sufficiently demoralized to engage in gainful work to provide for their families. While in some households both wife and husband had dependants from either side, the majority of the dependants were from the men's side. The men had sought approval from their wives to bring the deceased kin's children to stay with them as in Aol's case: *When my aunt died I brought two of her children to stay here with us. My husband also wanted to bring his late young brother's two children. He at first thought I would object, but I asked him to go ahead and bring them.* Similarly, Akumu – a widow, informs that her husband first sought for her approval before bringing his late young brother's children for adoption. This seems to be indicative of the women's willingness to provide not only for their children but their deceased kin's children as well despite the difficulties encountered.

Quite significant to note is the role of dependent children in household livelihoods. It is clear that while children received care from their foster or adoptive parents, they also actively participated in the activities that translated into the well-being they enjoyed. Akumu's management of her household amply illustrates this observation. Alongside her own six biological children, Akumu has more seven dependants. Three children belonged to her deceased brother who died during displacement in a camp. Their mother had also died a year after their father. The other four belonged to her late brother in-law who is also considered dead as no news have been heard of him since his abduction by the LRA insurgents, says Akumu. Asked how she managed to work on the maize and simsim gardens as well as attend to the orange plants, Akumu responds *"the children and I do it".* When I enquired whether the children go to school, she adds:

> They do. Very early in the morning, before they go to school, we go to the garden. They dig for an hour or so, and then I set them free to go to school. When they come back in the evening, we also go to the garden. By the end of the day you find that we have done good work together. I know it's not easy for them, but without doing that, I cannot manage.

This indicates that while it may be true that taking in children orphaned by war may have both mental and economic stresses associated with it (Raven Roberts cited in Cohn 2013:43), Akumu's narrative suggests that these dependent children may not be social and economic burdens to their care takers. Rather, they are active participants in the construction of livelihoods organized by women.

4.2.3 Education and livelihoods

A cursory look at the age of the informants indicates that when war erupted in 1987, only a few were adults. The majority of the informants were born shortly before or during the war. Conventional understanding maintains that in a conflict situation, the majority of people miss an opportunity to go to school. This might lead to a situation where a large post-war illiterate female population that finds no space in the competitive formal labour market turning to alternatives that require less or no formal skill and education. This possibly explains why only one informant, Akello, is formally employed by government though she combined teaching with other activities

and why fourteen others practiced smallholding.[50] One did crocheting, and another one cut trees for charcoal burning. Proper trade classification for the remaining one informant could not be clearly established since at the time of the study she lived and closely worked with her parents. Nonetheless, her parents were also smallholders. The findings also concur with Mazurana *et al* (2008) earlier observations that most of the female youth in northern Uganda have no education with only a few being functionally literate.

4.3 Pre-war livelihood activities

Acholi society had gone through different periods of change and transition even before the emergence of the Lord's Resistance Army. Thus during the conversational interviews with informants the "pre-war period" time frame was limited to the immediate pre-LRA war times that they managed to make recollections of. According to some informants the immediate pre-LRA situation may be explained as characterized by a relatively clear gender division of roles in which women undertook tasks different from those of their male spouses. Invited to make memories of the pre-war situation, Megalonyo commented:

> *We had some cows before the war. My husband concentrated on these and the orange plants, whilst I mainly did the growing of simsim.*

Aceng was born just a few years before the war. She got married at a very young age as the war was going on. Her recollections of gender roles, and who did what before her husband met his death during the war, are similar to those of Megalonyo. She said:

> *Before my husband died, he grew majorly maize and other crops, whilst I brewed our local beer (Ajono). So, though I sometimes helped him on his garden, I had my own business. That is how we lived when my husband was still alive.*

These remarks suggest that most women had work to do with the majority of them engaged in subsistence farming.This observation is supported by COWI's (1999) findings which reveal that at the beginning of the 1990's before war engulfed the entire northern region, subsistence farming accounted for 77% or more of economic activities and employed about 95% of the population. Only a few eked a living from endeavors not directly related to land use. Out of the

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[50]A smallholding is a small farm supporting a single family with a focus on producing for home consumption (subsistence farming) though crops may also be grown.

seventeen informants recruited for participation in the study only three: Anyadwe, Aceng and Akello (see Table 1 above) were engaged in livelihood means that were not directly tailored to land use. This, however, should not be construed as meaning that they did not grow any crops for home consumption at all, but that subsistence farming did not constitute their household's chief means of survival. That many women were actively engaged in productive work and thus able to feed their families during peaceful times explains the absence of dependency on humanitarian assistance that became a major source of survival during the war when most of the population did little or no work at all during displacement in the camps (Dolan 2009).

4.4 Women's means of sustenance during turbulent times

> *During the war, like other people, we also fled this place which was then under control of Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) and went to the camp. What do you do in the camp? (Lamara).*

Violent conflict displaces human populations and renders the exploitation of livelihood assets; natural, social, financial and human for human survival difficult. As the war in Acholiland raged on, the traditional division of economic roles and institutional arrangements that make possible the exchange of goods and services (markets) were broken and thrown into disorder. Lamara rightly indicates that people were compelled to flee to camps. Some were abducted and others killed. Attacks on women working in their gardens and the subsequent mutilation of their ears, lips and breasts (Lautse 2006) rendered farming an insecure and an unviable venture. *"What do you do in the camp?"* asks Lamara. Though some informants reported sneaking out of the camp confinements in search of 'anything to sell or eat' which was in itself very difficult due to the harsh control by soldiers of Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF) many informants related that they 'did nothing' economically gainful.

As access to land and the harvesting of other natural resources became more and more constrained, humanitarian food relief became a core source of survival as most of the informants reported increasingly depending on food aid provided by the United Nations World Food Programme (UNWFP) while they lived in camps for the internally displaced persons IDP's. El-Bushara and Sahl (2005:19) note: war's increased alienation of Acholi people from their natural settings reduced access to agricultural production thereby increasing people's dependence on

relief supplies provided by non-governmental agencies . Notable of the changes in women's means of survival was the emergence of and reliance on cash –related activities. *I had never thought of selling wild vegetables. We harvested these and prepared them for meals at home* said the 43 year old Amony. This means that foods, fruits and other edible commodities that were previously domestically consumed became commercialized in the camp environment so the women could have something in their purse to meet other needs not provided by the international humanitarian relief cartel.

4.5 Life sustenance in the post-war environment

As stated indicated earlier (Table 1), most of the informants lacked formal education and modern skills to sell in exchange for a wage to make a living. Thus, land forms a very fundamental base of sustenance for most of the women. The exceptions are Megalonyo who knits hats that she sells mostly to men and Akello who is a teacher. The study also revealed little variation in the crops that the women are dependent upon. Most women reported growing crops that include; simsim, cassava, maize, groundnuts, sorghum, sweet potatoes, vegetables and millet. The need to earn some cash for the procurement of goods and services that the women could not produce themselves compelled them to sell part of their crops which are meant for home consumption. Adyero's comment on this, which is representative of other informants' concern about the same, clearly articulates this observation:

> *So before thinking about money issues, I use the food to feed my children. I told you I grow a variety of crops, so I make sure my children have a balanced diet. Secondly, I sell the harvests and send my children to school and also meet other needs such as paying for treatment in a hospital.*

In addition to crops, animals as well as domestic birds are reared. The most frequently cited animals reared were goats. Only one informant mentioned a piggery project under her spouse's management. However, according to the woman, the idea leading to its establishment originated from her.[51] Only three informants reported having reared cows for some time though they no longer kept them at the time of the study either because the cows were killed or stolen during the war, or died due to disease.

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[51] According to Pinoloya, on realizing that her husband who was shot in the arm during the war could not ably hold a war to support her in the tilling of land, she proposed to him that they start a piggery project for him to manage. The initial capital for the project was obtained from the sale of simsim whose prices shot up one time enabling them to make huge profits.

Megalonyo speaks of her households' pre-war wealth status in these terms:

> *Before the war, we had a good number of cows that needed attention, but when war erupted, these cows were all stolen. After the war, we again bought some cows, but because they lacked good attention, some of them fell sick and died and finally the surviving ones were sold.*

To supplement benefits reaped from smallholding, domestic birds such as pigeons and ducks are kept. However, my interviews and on-site observations revealed that chicken were the most frequently reared bird stocks. A closer questioning of the reasons underlying this pattern showed that the majority of the women reared chicken because of their easy convertibility into cash income-a very scarce, hard to obtain, yet much needed resource to settle medical bills and the daily basic needs in a home. Amony whose husband has to visit the hospital periodically says:

> *You see my husband is sick. He needs medicine. We need money to go to hospital and buy the medicine. What do you do when you don't have the money? You sell chicken.*

For Anenochan, chicken is easy to sell and an important cash source for the purchase of household items:

> *I keep chicken because I cannot sell a goat if I want to buy salt and paraffin. If I need these things, I sell a chicken.*

This implies that unlike other animals such as goats, chicken are not long-term family assets since they can be immediately sold off to help settle urgent or pressing household needs.

Figure 4: *Free-range chicken roaming on the courtyard at the informant's home*

4.6 Livelihoods diversification

Field data indicate that in their effort to make ends meet, women often combined and recombined different activities. *For a living, I do many things.* This is Lamwaka's response when asked what she does to maintain her family that includes her two grandchildren whose father (her son) was gruesomely murdered during the war. Similarly, Akello, has this to say about how she single handedly managed to take care of all the members in her household:

> *I do so many other things… You cannot do one thing and think you will survive*
> *this tough situation with all these children. You have to do this and that or else you*
> *fail.*

Like Lamwaka and Akello, many women spoke of varying their productive activities to cover a range of other productive areas a practice that Ellis (1998:4) calls 'livelihood diversification': a "process by which rural families construct a diverse portfolio of activities and social support capabilities in their struggle for survival and in order to improve their standards of living". In other words, the 'law of specialization' as defined by economic theory does not hold as the women do not concentrate on one economic activity to the total exclusion of other income generating activities.[52] What was observed is that in addition to crop production (the primary activity) upon which many depend, the 'secondary resource portfolio' constituted mostly of non-agricultural or non-farm or off-farm activities and strategies.

Apart from smallholding, Akello was also involved in quarrying. Anyadwe, for her part operated a small shop and also brewed a local beverage- *Ajono*, while Anenochan offered labour in return for a wage. Other livelihood portfolios mentioned include but were not limited to; remittances from relatives living abroad,[53] brick making, and reliance on kins and friends. Participants rationalized and explained their motivations for relying on at least two or more activities for survival. For example, Lamwaka grows a few crops. She also crushes stones in a quarry. It is not that she likes this venture. No, it is because life is not easy and she has no other option but to engage in this non-farm activity which in her thinking is not feminine. It is also hazardous. During the interview, Lamwaka's left leg's big toe was seen bleeding. When asked, she said that

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[52]Economic theory defines specialization as the production of one or just a few goods and services.
[53] Though this only applied to Megalonyo who had children living abroad.

she had hit her toe with a hammer while working. After some silence as though she was struggling to listen to some far distant voice, in a shaky tone, Lamwaka speaks:

> *When you see a woman like me crushing stones, it means that life is not easy. I don't like quarry work but I have nothing to do. We have this saying: when you see a dog eating bones, it is not that it does not like meat. It is just that it cannot find meat.*

Although Lamwaka seems to dread quarrying and has been frowned upon and scorned by her village-mates for being greedy for money, 'pull' factors (such as real or perceived profitability) still pull her to the industry. First, in comparison with farming, not only is quarrying more lucrative thus bringing in more money in the purse, but this cash in-flow is steady as well. Secondly unlike farming, quarrying does not depend on rain which due to climate changes is both insufficient and unreliable.[54]

For many seasons now rain insufficiency has upset their farming endeavors and rendered the enterprise's profitability unpredictable. She elaborately states:

> *Many people say that I have greed for money. They ask: how can a woman go into that dangerous work? But I tell you people, I am managing my family because I don't listen to such useless talk. No one is going to feed my children. There is more money in the quarry than in farming. You see one good thing about it is that it doesn't depend on rain which is not enough, so when I go to the quarry, I am sure of making money. Also, I don't need capital.*

If we apply Nussbaum's (2000) conception of human agency as *practical reason and control over one's environment*, Lamwaka's declaration: *I am managing my family because I don't listen to such useless talk,* portrays a conscious and responsible agent who despite living and working under deplorable circumstances is determined to pursue her goal. In spite of her dangerous work judged as unsuitable for women, she is insistent on carrying on with it to bring food on her household's table. She sustains her family no matter how society judges her actions. Positive agency, adds poverty and gender studies scholar Kabeer (1999) includes one's capacity to articulate choices, pursue ambitions whether or not they face opposition from others .

Lamwaka seems to exhibit this. She appears to demonstrate that she understands the meaning and purpose of one's life pursuits (Bandura 2001). Through self introspection- the examination

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[54]Insufficient and unreliable rainfall is/was a major problem echoed by almost all the informants.

of one's own conscious thoughts and feelings (Schultz and Schultz 2012), she verified the soundness of her actions and concluded that with her actions being neither injurious to any one's rights and freedoms, nor in contravention of any laws, she must exercise her autonomy, and act to fulfill her goal that she perceives as being in line with her conception of the good.

To Lawino who in addition to smallholding rears goats and chicken, it is foolhardy to concentrate on one economic activity. Where do you turn to in case of failure? she seems to wonder. Idiomatically, she comments:

> *We do that (diversifying livelihood portfolios) because we don't know what comes tomorrow. I mean what if you only planted maize or simsim and it does not grow well, don't you think you will die of hunger? In Acholi we say: You cannot put all your eggs in one basket", so we cannot risk planting only one crop.*

Akello, a teacher who also makes and sells bricks and deals in lacere or mukene-silver cyprinid fish seems to share the same reasons as Lawino for diversifying her income and livelihood activities. Unlike all the others, she is lucky to be a civil servant. She earns a monthly salary. However, with the delays in the payment of this salary, yet with children who need a lot of money for schooling, she has to vary and expand her income sources.

> *Sometimes my salary does not come on time. So you have to expand your means of getting money…otherwise you'll fail.*

In all cases, the general rationale for diversifying livelihoods portfolios or 'doing many things' as the women called it may have been to correct or circumvent the negative consequences of relying on one venture 'a strategy primarily intended to offset risk' (Dercon and Krishnan 1996).

However, there are some observable differences in regard to why the women vary their income sources. For example, implicit in Lamwaka's submission that "*I don't like quarry work* (which she does alongside crop production) *but I have no option",* is the possibility that her varying of income sources more particularly her engagement in quarry work, may have been out of what Ellis terms necessity-involuntary or desperation motivation for diversification (Ellis 2000:291).

4.7 Formation of groups

In my discussions with the women, a number of issues were raised. Prominent among the challenges cited by informants in their struggle to put both 'body and soul together' was shortage of labour for increased land cultivation and crop production to meet both their household food demands and surplus for sale. They also mentioned that the insufficient and unreliable rain was immensely upsetting their subsistence farming endeavors and thirdly, lack of financial capital to expand businesses (for those who had them) or create startups was an issue.

As a measure for cushioning against the risks of continued reliance on crop farming whose unpredictable success is highly dependent on weather, women reasoned that establishing off-farm income generating activities would be a workable alternative. They also said unlike farming whose returns are realized after a long period of time, off-farm ventures bring in cash at short intervals which is useful for the settlement of their day-to-day needs. Thus, women sought to address their individual lack of capital(s) through the formation of what I name as "resource pooling groups" namely the; cash income pools and labour pools.

4.7.1 Cash income pools

A call for economic liberalization fronted by two leading global financial players-the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB), began in the 1980's and continues to the present. Uganda like other countries in the developing world started implementing the neoliberal policy package. The argument was that less state involvement in economic affairs, coupled with free market and private sector development would reduce poverty, foster efficiency and enable access to services including credit schemes to benefit the poor including women.

Despite the huge presence of credit institutions following the implementation of the neoliberal agenda, Uganda's rural illiterate women working outside of the formal sector still face insurmountable credit constraints. Loan acquisition from formal institutions is mostly linked to mortgaging assets such as land or cattle which most women do not own. All the women interviewed, spoke of the inability to access financial credit to shore up their businesses, start new ones or hire labour.

Aol for example received her startup capital for her small shop from her spouse. She speaks of her business and financial holdups:

> *As you can see my business is very small. It is not as big as I want. I have no money now because my family is big. It is not easy to get a loan. May be if you are a teacher or doctor. One day, I asked my friend who works with the bank in Kitgum. She told me to ask my husband to sign for me but I feared.*

Anyadwe- who before the war was a tailor but now practices subsistence farming, brews a local beverage ajono and operates a small explains:

> *After selling my cassava I built that house. It is a business house. I borrowed some money from our group and started a business. But as you can see, my business is so small. I have many people who need support. So it is not growing. I don't think it will collapse, but it may not grow also because I don't have capital.*

Aol and Anyadwe's accounts are a reflection of the general credit access limitations from formal financial institutions faced not only by the interviewees but the entire rural womenfolk. As a strategy to rise above such challenges, women formed informal village savings and loan associations. The nature of their modus operandi being informal, the challenges arising out of this status quo are not easily prosecutable in courts of law. Acceptance and membership to the association(s) are secured through trust. This, according to Akello, a leader of a village savings and loan association may have arisen from a case in which a 'bad member' borrowed and defaulted but could not be sued in a legal court. She narrates:

> *A member borrowed, but never paid back. She is a bad person. We wanted to sue her in a court in Kitgum town. But the chairperson L C I said our association is not recognized by government. So, she will win the case. He advised us to handle the matter ourselves. He helped us to solve the problem. Now it is very difficult to join us if we don't know you as a good person. Members have to trust you first. Also you have to be hard working, because if you are lazy, you'll not pay.*

Each member makes a weekly minimum deposit of UGX 1000 (approximately 0.380230 USD) in her account. However, more could be deposited depending on one's financial standing. Only members are eligible to borrow.

Figure 5: *On the left is a structure constructed with bricks and mud. On the right is the business/shop that it accommodates. She financed this construction and started business by selling a garden of cassava and borrowed from a Village and Savings Association to which she is a member.*

4.7.2 Labour pools

Another major setback mentioned by nearly all the women was labour inadequacy for expanded land cultivation and increased farming. For some women such as the widows, this labor shortage was due to the death of their male spouses who previously did the masculine work of clearing the bush to make land ready for cultivation. Those with spouses, often struggle with no support. Such factors as male spouse neglect, prolonged sicknesses that impair physical movements, burden of caring for both sick and the young, habitual male drunkenness and male involvement in multiple relationships were all listed. Complaining about the heavy burden and responsibility for maintaining her children despite being married to an unsupportive man, Abur, a former LRA abductee speaks:

> *I just have the status of a married woman, but in the actual sense, I am not. I live like a single mother. Can you believe that even for the days he has been here; he has not come to work with me in the garden? Every day he goes to drink alcohol in the bar in the trading center. He does not buy anything like food at home.*

Apparently, Abur is married to a police officer working in Kampala who at the time of the interview was at home in Kitgum to attend a burial of his deceased relative. Similarly, asked whether her husband gives a hand in farming activities 29 year old Aciro, a mother of five responds:

> *No. My husband doesn't accompany me to the garden at all. He hates digging so much. I do all the digging with my daughter. His work is to loiter around looking around for women to sleep with.*

Figure 6: *A mother doubling both child care and work*

From the quotes above we learn that some men seem to have abdicated from providing for their families. They are not always supportive of their wives in ensuring their households' upkeep. This may to some degree be due to the disempowering effects of war that restricted their access to the factors of production which they previously controlled (El-Bushara and Sahl 2005).With war creating many responsibilities for women in which many have emerged as breadwinners and household heads, women have proven to become more creative in devising means of tackling challenges that confront them. One example of women's creativity is the formation of groups of 10-30 women who come together to cultivate gardens in different homes. Fifty year old Adyero and a widow who boasts of her 'chief leader' title for a group told how she spearheaded group formation in her village:

> *To educate children nowadays, one has to struggle and do so many things. I organized women in this village to form a group so that we do rotational tilling of the members' cultivable land. For example when we dig someone's garden and we finish it today, the next day we go to another place until we cover all our group members. The situation now is tougher before. We have to come together. One person cannot manage alone.*

That Adyero invokes words such as "coming together" and "one cannot manage alone" in her narrative is important. She seems to suggest that in order to recover from shocks, setbacks and vulnerabilities occasioned by war, collective action should be harnessed. Not only is this expected to help correct constraints on individual resource scarceness since "no one has the time, energy, and resources to master every realm of everyday life" (Bandura 2001:13), but it is also a form of collective agency. Moreover, as humans, we do not live our lives in isolation. Many of

the things that we seek are achievable only through socially interdependent effort. Thus we have to work in coordination with others to secure what we cannot accomplish on our own (ibid).

4.8 Family/social bonds and survival

Having self-confidence, exhibiting propensity to act on one's own, and pursuing what one deeply cherishes and values, I suggest are part and parcel of agency and empowerment. Agency and empowerment should not be exclusively construed as a function of two variables; education and access to economic resources. This is because as I already showed in the preceding chapter there are educated women who earn monthly salaries but have no say in budgeting or spending them. The mere earning of or access to monetary and other resources may not signify empowerment unless there is accompanying ability to control and use the resources. Self-confidence, aspirations, harmony, cooperation from family members and connections outside ones household seem to be another resource that the women mobilized to act in their own interest as they forged a new beginning from the ashes of violent conflict.

In their narratives, some women recounted being taught by their parents about the virtues of hard work, of respect, getting support from their spouses and having high hopes in their children. When asked about who were most supportive of them in their efforts to make ends meet, some women mentioned husbands with the highest frequency. Digging deeper into her memory archives, Akello speaks thus of her husband:

> *Being a widow is a very big challenge. Before my husband died, we used to plan and work together. But after he died, all the burden of taking care of the children fell on me. When I am confronted with a problem, I don't have anyone to share it with except those older children of mine. Widowhood is a tough situation. It is so frustrating working alone.*

Similarly, Lamwaka appreciates her husband's support with work at the quarry although she is quick to note that he is not as fast as she is.

> *My husband comes with me to the quarry site. We work together, but he is not as quick as I am. I will finish a huge pile of stones and start on another before he finishes with the first.*

Women who spoke of jointly making decisions with their husbands were also quite likely to speak of cordial relations as well as support in their marriages. This would lead to what Diener and Biswas-Diener cited in Narayan called positive affect. According to them people

experiencing positive affect or pleasant emotions are likely to be confident, energetic and actively engage with the environment and manipulate it for their good- all typical facets of empowerment (Narayan (2005). In some interviews, varying responses followed questions about who the women thought were most supportive of them in their struggle to win a morsel of bread. These included responses as; "he only loiters around looking for women to sleep with", "I don't care about him anymore", and he spends much of the time in the bar drinking". What is interesting to note is that almost in all cases where the husbands for those married with spouses alive and men were reported to be unhelpful, the women did not remain passive. They had no option but to take charge. They stood to be masters of their destiny. They did all that which was within their means to manage their households. Left to fend for themselves and their children, women exhibited increased will, courage and determination to continue living in spite of the odds. Abur who is married to an unsupportive spouse says:

> *How do you wait for someone who did not tell you when he was leaving the house?*
> *How do you wait for someone who spends several months away from home? It*
> *means you will die of hunger. I am now working for my children. I don't care*
> *about him.*

Women's accounts indicate that along with emotional resilience and a great desire to make a new beginning after livelihood systems were disrupted, family bonds (where they exist) have been very crucial resources that the women have mobilized and relied upon in their search for a means to survive. In Africa and elsewhere agnatic and cognatic kinship and other extended familial relations are not only important in enhancing people's ability to generate a livelihood, but are also a major source of support and protection against vulnerability in the face of crises. In fact with limited state facilitation and provision of public goods following calls for economic liberalization, these social institutions constitute what I call the first social protection floor.

To put this concept in perspective I will draw on memories of my own home experience as an illustrative anecdote. Back in the 90's my sister tied a knot with her spouse. Although as a family we did not have money for a big wedding, immediate family members agreed that we had to improvise and send off our sister with at least a modest function. At the time, we were recovering from the shock of losing our father; the sole breadwinner. At a nuclear family meeting, we concluded that as part of the resource mobilization strategy for the event, we had to first enlist the contributions from those closer to us-uncles, aunts, nieces and nephews and other

extended familial relations before reaching out for the support from 'outsiders' (those unrelated to us). Thus our immediate kins formed our first level of support.

In the context of this study, some interviews revealed that war had an impact on social norms such as giving, sharing as well as reciprocity. War, said Akello "changed people and engendered a money first" mentality. People are reluctant to share their meager resources with others for free. They need money. Other interviews however contradict Akello's assertion that war diminished community members' commitment and willingness to return favors as well as perform other acts of kindness. It clearly emerges that support offered by both neighbors and relatives was one of the main sources of social security. Asked about where she received support when in a crisis the 33 year old Anenochan and a widow informs that amiable relations with her neighbors have enabled mutual exchanges between them.

> *My relatives are far. But as neighbors, we are in good terms and we help one another in many things. For example this term, our children did not have school uniform, but our neighbor who is a tailor and a good friend gave them uniform and we paid back last week.*

Friends and relatives are a source of assistance. Abey's case exemplifies this so well. Twenty-two year old Abey mothers a child born out of an incestuous relationship. Since traditional customs do not allow for marriage between relatives, she could not marry her child's father. She is now a single mother living with her parents. Asked how she is managing her survival and that of her child, she says that both herself and her child are living under her parents' care but quickly adds that as a mature person she also improvises. Asked further to share what this improvisation involves, after a momentary laughter, she says:

> *I also improvise as a mature person. I have friends who I tell my problems and they give me some money. Also there are relatives who have given me clothes that their children put on when they were the same age as my son. They kept them so well that they look new. Sometimes I go to my friend's workshop (she is a tailor) pick some 'cut-offs' and make a skirt or blouse for myself or my son. You see that one (touches a cloth that her son is putting on) I made it myself.*

Pinoloya's her cousin who owns ox-ploughs has been helpful by lending them the facility whenever they have asked him for it. However, in a number of instances, informants reported that their relatives and neighbors could not support them at all and if they did, it is only to a limited degree. *"What support do I expect from people who are more or less like me?"* wonders

Akumu. They attributed this to war which affected them all and in some cases severely affecting their relatives or neighbors more than themselves.

4.9 Women in men's work: a transformative path?

Writing about women and wartime, Turshen (1998) notes that during men's absence, women take painful steps forward as they start to transform traditional gender roles, assume men's former tasks, gain public spaces previously denied and even achieve a degree of economic independence. Although war and conflict cause distressful challenges to living a desirable and meaningful life, they also create opportunities in which women awake from passivity . Interestingly, Turshen's observation is in consonance with many of my interviewees' accounts. Aceng's interview (see text below) clearly demonstrates this:

Aceng: My story

I am 29 years old, widow with 2 children and a dependant. I completed 2 classes of primary education. I have a small garden of maize. Mainly, I cut trees and burn charcoal. You can see some in the corner there. I used to mine some sand on the banks of the river and sold it to house builders. I am also a member of the village savings association for women.

You know we women are not as strong as men. Yet certain jobs require masculine strength. I told you that I cut trees and burn charcoal.

I struggle cutting down the trees. Pilling up the logs together for burning is a tough task. That stage requires men. Before going to the forest one needs to eat first. Sometimes the food is not available Life is not simple for me. I have attracted sympathy from people. Sometimes men give me free assistance without me asking for it. Folks here have given me a name "Fire woman" because of this work. Others say that I am a man because I am doing men's work. There is a time when I thought of finding a man to take care of me, but later I changed my mind. Men have turned to drunkardness. They aren't helpful at all. That's why I have decided to stay alone and do my businesses. I fear that I might get a man who will start giving me orders. I don't want that. I am free. I do what I want. I am getting good money from these activities.

Women like Aceng, undertook economic activities which they did not previously do. Some of these activities are among those considered unfit for women as Aceng's and Lamwaka's (quarrying) cases vividly illustrate. As a result women playing roles considered masculine or stereotypically regarded above a woman's capacity, were perceived as men. For example Akello a widow, who in addition to practicing her professional career teaching, lays bricks, keeps some

animals and practices subsistence farming. From these activities, she has been able to educate her children. Awed by her industriousness, like Aceng, her village folks have conferred to her the title of "woman in a man's skin" as she tells:

> *Here in our village, people say that I am a strong woman. They say that they haven't seen a woman without a husband keeping the children well, paying their school dues, laying bricks and keeping animals, growing a variety of crops. People say that the body is that of a woman, but actions are those of a man. And I think they are right in the sense that what I am doing now, some men cannot do. So I think there is some truth in what they are saying.*

This is consistent with Grabska's (2013) study of the Southern Sudan Nuer Returnee women that the community perceived as "social men" women who did work or made accomplishments considered masculine. It is important to note that these accounts suggest that there have been major transformations occurring in women's lives occasioned by war. In the changing post war environment, women recognized that they needed to work and "get money" something that would later enhance their economic empowerment as well as autonomy; *"I am free. I do what I want with no one imposing their orders on me"* declares Aceng. Similarly, aspects of autonomy and independence are evident in Anyadwe's tale. Though Anyadwe is married, she calls her marriage one 'gone bad'. This is because after the war her husband 'abandoned' her for another woman in Kitgum town where he spends much of the time. He no longer provides for the family. This has however turned out to be a blessing in disguise to Anyadwe as she is now in charge of her life; she plans, works, earns and budgets for her money without undue interference from anyone:

> *When it is only the man buying everything in the house-salt, nyanya (tomatoes) and other things in the home, he treats you like nothing. When my husband was doing this, (providing for the family) he sometimes quarreled even over small matters. But now I work, earn and plan for my money without anyone interfering with what I am planning to do.*

These women's narratives display creative ways whether masculine or not of accessing livelihoods which have helped them gain economic empowerment. This economic empowerment has in turn led to women taking on stronger decision-making roles within their households (El- a fact supported by research on Uganda, Sudan, Somalia and Angola (Bushara and Sahl 2005) as well as on how this contributes to reconfiguring unequal gender relations (Grabska 2013).

Also we notice that unable to depend on their families or husbands to provide for them or their children, women are compelled to pursue livelihood strategies that take them away from the ideals of submissive womanhood. These cases agree with my earlier postulation in chapter three (See Figure 2) in which I argue that, war, through its destructive impact, "takes away" but can also "give back" through its transformative loop. Put in another way, in the words of Turshen, "in the very breakdown of morals, traditions, customs, community and (I add all that holds human life together) war also opened and created new beginnings for some women (Turshen, 1998: 20).

4.10 Production vis-à-vis household decision-making power

In the midst of their loss and devastation, women in the post war Kitgum created new meanings and realities that challenged the status quo and carved out openings in which spaces for expressing and exercising their power and influence became possible. However, it is not rosy for all them. Some are still living under the machismo of men. There is limited room for them to make decisions independent of men. Oddly enough, either for lack of choice or for purposes of saving their marriages, some women have taken for granted and meekly accepted the view that some decisions fall in the realm of that which is beyond question. Women's social position seems to impose limits to what decisions they can make.

Though data confirm that the burden of supporting the family has fallen largely on women's shoulders in the struggle to survive, there is still a continued pervasive influence of male decision making prerogatives in terms of resource use even when they are contributing less or not at all to household welfare. And this has implications for production as well as household welfare. This scenario is well exemplified by Amony's tale. Amony has a sick husband whose ill-health hinders him from engaging in anything productive. All day he is laying on a mat in the verandah of his hut where we actually found him during the course of this study. As a result, the entire household's welfare rests on Amony including the responsibility for ensuring that her husband periodically visits hospital. It is thus expected that Amony should have power, influence and control over the resources or what is in economic theory called factors of production.

Surprisingly however, Amony's spouse has under his belt all the decisions relating to land-the main asset that supports all the activities upon which the family depends. He according to

Amony allots her a portion of land for the family's food production and other activities. He hires out another part for money because, as a man, he must have some money in his pocket says Amony. Disturbingly, it is the infertile and sandy portion, one unsuitable for farming that he allots to the family. Resultantly, the yields are meager and insufficient to meet the household's food needs. Although Amony admits to sharing her frustrations with him about this, she is cautious not to go far because "in his house, a man is a man".

> *It is my husband who allocates me a portion of land for our food. And sometimes he advises on what I should pald. I am doing everything but men are men. They hold powers in the family. He is the head of the family; I need to go by his decisions. When the crops did not do well on the plot he allocated me last season, I told him…but I was careful because it is his land. I am in his house.*

Amony's narrative seems to run counter to a view that conflict disempowers men, strips them of the power to exercise authority, leadership, or control over resources. Although Amony's husband does not provide for his family, we still see contours of a man as a controller, a figure of authority and leadership reflected in him albeit in an inimical sense. Also in Amony's account we see the element of unequal intra-household decision-making power, a situation that may be majorly attributed to her lack of any claims of ownership and control over the household's productive resources and assets.

4.11 Fractured childhood, fractured assets, fractured livelihood

I, have demonstrated how some women have made gains including enjoying the status of "social men". However, others have no gains to celebrate. Challenges still linger on. Women without an education, former abductees, the divorced, those that have experienced ephemeral marriage relationships and those lacking financial or social capital and other material resources still find themselves weighed down by the survival realities of the complex post-war landscape. They are finding it difficult to organize themselves for a re-start in life. Lanyero is an example of women whose both pre- and post-war lives continue to endure the torments of violent conflict. With tears in her eyes during our conversation she grieves: "I have only lived in hell all my life". Lanyero's childhood was fractured early in life when she was abducted by the LRA insurgents causing her to miss out on the opportunity to attend school. Later, she gets into marriage an institution through which she was able to gains access to some assets. Unfortunately, her marriage does not last long. It breaks down. Consequently, she loses not only the marriage but the resources that

came along with it. To have a full a grasp of Lanyero's situation and other women like her,it is important to present her story at length.

Lanyero: My story

I am a 28 year old mother of four children, three boys and a girl. I am a divorcee. After my marriage ended, I came to stay with my father, here where we are sitting. I cultivate my father's land, and grow some crops-maize and simsim.

I lost my mother when I was still very young. I didn't get the chance of going to school because after my mother's death, my father married another wife who didn't give me an opportunity to study. (Pauses a bit and then starts): Then came war. I was abducted by the LRA and taken to the bush. Luckily, one day, my colleague and I escaped and got home.

After my escape and return home, I got married. The first years of my marriage were good. I don't know what happened to my husband later. He started abusing and beating me whenever he got drunk. At first, I persevered, hoping that things would change until one day when he got a machete and cut me here (shows us a deep scar on her shoulder). I knew that things would never change in my favour. Together with my children, we escaped and slept in the bush. The following morning, I told our neighbor that finally I was leaving with my children. I had sent news to my father to pick us the following day. This is the life I have lived ever since my mother passed away. I have never been happy. But I thank God that I am alive, because others died in the bush.

I have no startup capital; otherwise I would have loved to run a small business to get some money to buy my children scholastic materials. I did not study that's why I am going through all this. At least I want my children to get somewhere. They might help me in future. I have only lived in hell all my life (drops into tears). It's not long since I came here, so I need time to get used to the people before joining other women in those groups. I am still disorganized. I have nothing. My father is supportive, but he must be tired of taking care of us although he does not tell me.

Lanyero's story mirrors other women's predicament that I did not get a chance to speak to who have an absolute lack of most assets ranging from natural, social, financial and other resources necessary for one to secure a means to live. She missed out on schooling. Her childhood was disrupted by years in the bush after abduction. Even when she gets into marriage an institution through which many women in Africa and Uganda in particular gain access to and use of assets land in particular, she is severely abused. The marriage is abortive, she runs away with nothing after expending her labour on wealth creation in her former spouse's home. The only social capital she has but feels is frail, is her father's support.

Speaking in a very low tone and looking disturbingly worried she declares: "I have nothing". In this declaration, her demeanor and tone, I saw a poor, low spirited and a disempowered person

without what Sen (1985b) cited in Kabeer (1999: 438) refers to as capabilities: "the potential that people have for living the lives they want, of achieving valued ways of 'being and doing" She exhibited a lack of agency and means to exercise choice(s) of any sort. Indeed one with 'nothing' has nothing from which to choose since *choice necessarily implies the possibility of alternatives, the ability to have chosen otherwise* (Kabeer 1997: 437). Clearly Lanyero's transitory life; from home as a child into the bush as an abductee, then from the bush into an abusive marriage and then back to her home, put her in a vulnerable and complex situation in which she could do little to mobilize resources for survival. Put in another way, in terms of human, natural, social and financial capitals, Lanyero has lived a bruised life. Finally, Lanyero's case seems to correlate with my earlier claim in chapter one (*see section 1.3*) in which I showed that even long before armed violence erupts, women are already "on the frontlines" battling against warlike situations of structural violence that are in themselves hostile enough to women's efforts to live a meaningful life.

4.12 Summary

The chapter has presented and analyzed field data on how Acholi women earned a living before, during and after the two decades of LRA conflict. War had a destructive effect on Acholiland's rich agriculture, the main source of survival as well as other livelihoods systems leading to resource scarcity, a situation typical of societies emerging from conflict. This destruction, however, did not 'kill' the women's resolve to pick themselves up, organize and shoulder family survival. Contrary to Dowling's thesis that women were not trained for freedom at all, but for its categorical opposite-dependency (1981:3), women's life experiences have shown that women are capable of changing their situations with their own actions. Evidently, they are working and living under difficult circumstances, but putting up a spirited effort to survive. While a male spouse's contribution towards household welfare is welcome, it is not necessary for the woman to live.

The chapter's analysis reveals that: (i) women mobilize a diverse portfolio of resources to construct a means of living, (ii) a combination of war's impact and the limiting characteristics of gender have engendered enduring losses for some women such as Lanyero case has demonstrated. However, some women have through creative ways and resilience transcended the roadblocks encountered. By engaging in masculine work and taking on male responsibilities as

providers for their families, women have; expressed and exercised their agency, emerged as empowered actors, contested pre-war gender and social orders and attained some degree of independence.

Chapter 5: Summary and conclusion: picking up the pieces

This thesis has attempted to answer the question of how women in Kitgum District of northern Uganda cope after their livelihoods systems were devastated by the war between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and Museveni's regime. I started by going back in time to look at the events and the root causes of the war and its implications on the lives of the Acholi community. Scholars trace the genesis of violent conflicts in northern Uganda in Britain's ethnic divide and rule policy: an approach that engendered 'winners' and 'losers'. Southwesterners were the beneficiaries of prosperity as they were trained and equipped with the means of accumulation. The northerners emerged losers and victims of economic marginalization as their participation in wealth creation was relegated to the peripheral, a cause, partly blamed for the emergence of the LRA shortly after power capture by a westerner, Museveni.

As the war ends in 2008 and peace building initiatives commence, we see less of women's participation in peace-building efforts as evidenced by their lack of trust and non-involvement with reconstruction interventions such as NUSAF, NURP and PRDP even when their significant role in social and economic rebuilding of their community has been elaborated with use of empirical data in chapter four. That women are all of a sudden missing in peace-building processes in Northern Uganda may not be much of a surprise because in the aftermath' 'nationalistic loyalties are more valued than notions of gender equality" (McKay 2004:19)

I have argued that the failure by governments to pay attention to women's gendered needs tantamount not only to social and gender injustice but is also in stark contradiction to the ideals of a durable, just and sustainable peace for, as Galtung (1967) rightly says, peace means more than the mere absence of war (negative peace). It includes elements of equality, justice, freedom from want as well as the ability to access primary needs-food, shelter and others in order to live the lives that people want (positive peace).

It is majorly through talking and listening to people that we get to know what goes on in the life-worlds. To have a deeper understand of women's experiences in their search for positive peace in a post-LRA context, using qualitative in-depth interviews 17 women were spoken to with the

assistance of a female cultural broker. Through interviews women made reflections about their past and present livelihoods activities, choices, decisions and roles. The richness, diversity and complex nature of human experience makes it impossible to be penetrated and fully understood with just a single method. Such was the rationale for the use of observation methods in addition to the qualitative interviews.

Human actions and experiences are best studied and conceptualized when organized under a frame of reference. To help provide focus and understand how women went about pursuing survival options and strategies, this thesis largely drew upon the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) as its conceptual handle. However, as I pointed out, for all its strength in showing how people combine various forms of capitals to create livelihoods for themselves, the framework is silent about gender, a crucial variable at the centre of thesis' argument. Thus, the SLF was used through a gender lens. This fed into a theoretical discussion about how the variables of war and gender may coalesce to influence the character and nature of women's livelihoods options. Further, 'empowerment' and 'agency' were found to be useful analytical concepts. This is because of their recurrence in some of the women's narratives. Moreover it is concepts and codes that inductively emerge from or are "grounded" in data from research participants that explain better the phenomenon under investigation (Charmaz, 2014; Hennink 2013).

War, does not only engender losses but also some benefits. I argued that from the women's perspective, war's impact is two dimensional: destructive and transformative. The running argument here was that while war destroys or weakens the communities' livelihoods systems, on the other hand, the shock that it visits on the local structures and mores bring forth the opportunities that some women may take advantage of to exercise their independence.

To uncover how women in the present day northern Uganda got back on the feet after violent conflict's devastations on their lives, a general image about the Acholi socio-economic organization before the war was offered. Now hobbling from war's ruins the Acholi were once a prosperous people, with fertile arable land mainly practicing subsistence production and kept cattle a source of livelihoods and a means for payment of bride wealth. Until the war broke out

and dismantled gender role 'boundaries' to some degree, there seemed to be different economies under the same roof as men and women were involved in different livelihood enterprises.

Displacement and unable to access and use capitals-natural, financial and social, communities largely depended on supplies provided by humanitarian relief bodies. As the war ends and women 'drop off the radar' from the recovery agenda, they mostly rely on their own meager resources to cope with the realities occasioned by war. Importantly, these women are not homogenous as even those that I spoke to for this study differed in terms of age, marital status number of children and other dependants in the household and education levels among others. These demographic features were seen to have implications for how women coped. For example, the weak and ageing such as Megalonyo opted for knitting of hats, an economic venture that she found to match her frail health. For others such as Aceng a possible combination of widowhood, young age, resilience and determination to surmount the war-wrought difficulties no matter the circumstances, pushes them to challenge gender roles and engage in masculine work such as charcoal burning.

An analysis of women's narratives finds no resounding difference between women's pre and post-war livelihoods schemes. What is rather seen is a greater degree of continuity than change in the sense that the majority of the women interviewed for this study reported reviving or practicing their pre-conflict economic activities. Whether this was as a result of lack of other alternatives or the need to draw upon their earlier accumulated expertise in order to quickly re-establish themselves is difficult to determine. Getting a deeper view as to why most of them chose to revert to their pre-war occupations is an issue that required deeper probing. It is only in a few cases, where women who reverted to their pre-war livelihoods schemes combined them with new options.

A key feature of how the women mobilized to fend for their families is their ability to diversify their livelihoods portfolios. Often, they combined subsistence production with other off-farm ventures such as operating small shops, quarrying and poultry rearing in order to offset the risk of depending on subsistence farming which depends on rain yet according to the women, rain was gradually becoming insufficient and erratic due to climatic changes.

Frequently, women mentioned that they lacked sufficient labour to cultivate land for increased production to meet their increasing food and other needs. A lack of financial capital to expand their small business or start new ones was highlighted. To address these concerns, women exercised their collective agency in markedly vigorous creative ways by organizing themselves into resource-pooling groups namely' the labour and cash income pools. It is important to emphasize that the usefulness of these locally 'self-pooled' financial capital to the expansion or start-up of women's livelihood activities was greatly limited by its meagerness.

This scenario points to a need by governments and bodies involved with peace-building to direct focus on ensuring that financial services target and reach such women, support them both accumulate meaningful savings and individually access finance from formal financial institutions. This may go a long way in availing them some time and space to focus their attention on more other productive and pressing needs including time to care of their children, a responsibility they seem to solely bear.

With limited trust in external government interventions, familial and other social bonds were found to be another source of support for the women in their efforts to eke out a living. Kins supported the kins and neighbors had their fellow neighbors' shoulders to lean on during times of need. However, due to 'a money first' mentality as articulated by Akello, a social change that may be attributed to post-war resource scarcities and other dynamics, people are now reluctant to return 'free' favors. In a few cases where male spouses offered a hand, some women deployed the support to venture into work that was both hazardous and considered masculine. For instance Lamwaka reported doing her quarry work with help from her husband. Where male support is lacking partly due to war's disempowering effects on the men such as loss of grip on productive assets, single handedly, women carry the burden of their households' welfare.

The war in northern Uganda has undoubtedly given women greater social and economic responsibilities for their households' well-being. These responsibilities should ideally put women in a position where they have greater leverage in decision making concerning the use of productive capitals. The thesis findings prove that this is not the case as some men, using their masculine powers insist on taking a leading role in house-hold resource use and management

even when they have little (if any) contribution to family welfare as Amony's spouse case demonstrates. This also suggests that war merely shakes social orders between men and women but does not completely dismantle them as men still make use of the remnants of such hierarchical structures to exert their masculine control.

The research seems to confirm the hypothesis that women in war-affected northern Uganda mobilize diverse resources to maintain their wellbeing, thereby manifesting agency and creativity. It also has shown that war caused changes in gender relations that saw women assume greater household welfare responsibilities while the men considerably relinquished theirs. However, what remains as a challenge is that institutional changes that would provide women with decision making power consistent with these new and more responsible roles seem to have been have slow in coming (El-Bushara, 2010).

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APPENDIX

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University of Tromsø

Centre for Peace Studies

Interview Guide
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1.0: Introduction

This research project is being conducted to get to know how women in the post-war Kitgum are managing life. I am conducting this research for my master's course in Peace and Conflict Transformation at the University of Tromsø in Norway. I am particularly interested in the stories of women concerning their livelihoods. Everything that I will observe here and hear from you will only be used for this research project and will not be shared with anyone. Also your name and other identifiers such as location will not be used, to make sure that no one can identify you with any responses. Participation in the research/interview is voluntary. You are free to withdraw anytime you may want.

2.0: Background/Personal Information

2.1 Informant/Respondent No……………

2.2 Occupation……………………………………..

2.3 Age……………

2.4 Marital status…………………………

2.5 Level of education……………………………….

2.6 Number of children………………

2.7 Other dependants…………………

2.8 Home village/town…………………………..

3:Livelihoods Sources/Means

3.1 Are you engaged in any income-generating activity (ies)?

 If 'yes': What is it/what are they?

 If 'no': Why not?

3.2 Do you get any support from government or non-governmental agency?

 If 'yes': (a) Which agency?

    (b) What kind of support?

3.3 Apart from government or non-governmental organization where else (if any) do you get

 support?

3.4 In what form (if any) is the support?

3.5 Do you get assistance from friends or relatives?

3.6 If 'yes': Could you tell me about it.

3.7 Are your current income generating/livelihood activities similar to those of the pre-war

 situation?

 If 'yes': Which ones?

 If 'no': Why aren't you engaged in similar livelihood activities?

3.8 What income/livelihood activities were you previously engaged in?

3.9 What (if any) do you consider to have benefited/gained from being involved with these

 activities?

3.10 Has your involvement with these activities created any challenges?

If **'yes':** which challenges/how?

3.11 What are your reflections about your income sources?

3.12 What do people think/perceive of you as one involved with these enterprises/activities?

4.0: Closing question

4.1 Is there anything you would like to say/add?