



## **Women and War in Northern Uganda: A Reflection on the Respect for the Dignity of Women in War Time**

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### **Author's contribution**

*The sole author designed, analyzed and interpreted and prepared the manuscript.*

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article discusses the challenges of women in the conflict and post-conflict stages of the Northern Uganda Insurgence 1986-2006. During this war, some women lost their lives while others faced physical atrocities like rape, torture and disfigurement. Others suffered severe psychological torture involving watching their children being mutilated or killed. Those found in reasonable physical conditions were forcefully recruited into the rebel forces, but after the war, were stigmatized because in Acholi culture women are not supposed to participate in wars. In sum, the war involved great abuse of the woman's dignity. As a result, the woman in the affected areas lost even the little respect accorded to her culturally as evident in the fact that even those engaged the peace building and reintegration process were not recognized. This paper describes the abuse women suffered and its effects on their image in the community and discusses the effectiveness of the measures used in the rehabilitation and reintegration process. The methodology used in this

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research is qualitative, and the instruments used to collect data are in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and document review.

*Keywords: God; Joseph Kony; rebel leader; guerrilla warfare; dignity of a woman; reintegration; reconciliation; restoration.*

## ABBREVIATIONS

*HSM – Holy Spirit Movement started by Alice Lakwena to free the people from northern Uganda from the oppressive government of Yoweri Kaguta Museveni. Joseph Kony the rebel leader of the Lord's Resistance Army replaced Lakwena when she was exiled and continued the rebel activities.*

*LRA – Lord's Resistance Army of Joseph Kony the rebel Leader of the guerrilla warfare in northern Uganda which lasted more than twenty years.*

*IDP – Internally Displaced People's Camps created by Uganda government for the people who had been displaced from their homes and villages by the guerrilla war in northern Uganda.*

*UPDF – Uganda Peoples' Defense Force – Uganda National Army.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This article explores the social effects of armed conflict and the resultant loss of dignity among the women in Northern Uganda, and assesses the reintegration efforts as means of managing the situation. Within the field of international relations, there are three general forms of conflict: inter-states, internal and disputes between nation-states or violations of the state system of alliances. The conflict in northern Uganda was internal for the civil war raged on for more than twenty years within the country. Consequently, the women and children in that area were greatly affected.

The history of the northern Uganda conflict is traced from 1986 when Alice Lakwena formed her Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) which, she claimed, sought to free the northern Uganda region from the oppression perpetuated by Museveni's government. When Lakwena was exiled, Joseph Kony, who had joined this movement at the age of 18, took over power and changed the name of the group to the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Around 1995 Kony's rebels lost regional support and he resorted to self-preservation strategies of stealing supplies and abducting children for recruitment into his army. The boys were turned into soldiers while the girls became sex slaves to his Officials. [1] This was contrary to traditional Acholi society, because turning women into sex slaves was unheard of, marriage was by mutual consent.

### 1.1 Women in Traditional African Society

In most African societies and cultures women are viewed as polite, soft-spoken, dignified,

receptive, gentle and weak, yet today many are involved in bitter conflicts, voluntarily or forcefully recruited. Generally, though, many people still hold the traditional view about women as housewives and mothers as expressed by Veneranda Mbabazi thus,

"In many traditional societies, women are expected to get married, bear children for the family, rear them and take care of their husbands," [2].

These roles attached to women imply that they are not supposed to go for war or to get involved in intertribal conflicts. Instead, they are supposed to be protected at all costs. In traditional African societies, the line between combatants and noncombatants was clearly drawn, and causing harm to women and children was considered a taboo. Miriam Agatha Nwoye explains how culture protected women from the ravages of war in these terms:

"traditional Somali customary principles ... state that the under listed crowned heads cannot be killed in war: women and children... refugees, elderly and the sick... whoever kills these, is a coward and is ostracized," [3].

Although it is good for culture to advocate for the protection of women against the ravages of war, it denies them their God-given freedom in many ways. In the first place, this means that men and women have different experiences, skills, qualities and attitudes in performing tasks such as peace building and others. Many women in Uganda, due to ignorance, accept their inferior status as assigned by culture and would not take

up any leadership roles. Miria Matembe a woman activist in Uganda says that,

“Women ... have been and continue to be marginalized, down-trodden and exploited ... because of ignorance. Society lacks knowledge of who women really are; and sadly, women have accepted this society-given inferior status. This must change!” [4].

This fact explains why now, after the war, those women who had been on the battle field, those who had lived in camps and those who had headed families while their husbands were away fighting are reluctant to go back to their former society-assigned roles. In other words, such women “lost their innocence” and can no longer accept being buttered, abused or silenced. Today they have the courage to fight back and defend themselves. Thus, the woman’s attitude to life has always been fuelled by ignorance but now it is changing drastically. A few examples will demonstrate this. Meredith Turshen and Clotilde Twagiramariya say that,

“In modern forms of war ... women are also combatants; women resist and fight back; they take sides, spy, and fight among themselves. For example the civil war of 1980s in Uganda some women were soldiers, integrated into the ‘National Resistance Army’ (NRM). Some women like Gertrude Njuba supported the army with material requirements. She also mobilized funds and recruited soldiers she was a key person in that war. Njuba was not a victim but an active participant,” [5].

This demonstrates that the traditional view of women and war has changed and that women either choose or are forced to fight actively alongside men. Behrend says that,

“there was a woman among Kony’s (Kony the rebel Leader of Lord’s Resistance Army) people named Poline Angom who was possessed by twelve spirits. These spirits assisted Kony’s army in fighting, the spirit General Steven worked as Commander in chief and operated in the frontline” [6].

This woman was trusted by Kony and his group, otherwise they would not have let her use her magic to predict what was going to happen. Angom was therefore actively asserted her influence in the war. However, examples of women actively involved in war negate the view

which portrays men in armed conflict as perpetrators of war and women as benign bystanders or victims. This point is further confirmed by Caroline O.N. Moser and Fiona C. Clark who say that,

“Although military armed forces have been male-dominated institutions, in recent years women have increasingly joined both formal and informal armed groups” [7].

Despite active participation either as fighters or peace negotiators, women’s work is not given due recognition. Many women were active peace brokers in northern Uganda but their efforts were either taken lightly or given little attention. Although the composition of armed forces has changed and women can be part of the army, people’s attitude towards women combatants is taking long to change. Rehabilitation and reintegration centers offer sensitization sessions to war victims about the new changes taking place today and how every person’s human rights and dignity ought to be respected, but that has not helped to uplift the status of the woman.

## **2. METHODS USED TO COLLECT DATA**

The methodology used in this research was qualitative, incorporating descriptive designs to establish the impact of the conflict on women and men’s lives during and after the war. The instruments employed to collect data were observation, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. These helped in generating a detailed description of the attitudes, opinions, behaviors of the population as regards the conflict and its impact on the communities concerned. The design was particularly useful in diagnosing changes brought about by the reintegration processes in the lives of women and their perceived resilience options. In addition to this, the design helped the researcher to get unique information from the people directly involved in the conflict, the researchers and those counseling the victims of war. Several reports and papers written and presented in Conferences by different researchers were read.

### **2.1 Sampling and Data Collection**

The researcher used a multistage sampling procedure involving a combination of purposive and simple random sampling methods to select the enumeration areas as well as the sample respondents. Respondents were selected from Gulu and Lira Districts of northern Uganda.

These districts represent two major areas where the guerrilla warfare concentrated. In each district one county and sub-county was selected. It is from this sub-county that two parishes were randomly selected making a total of two parishes per a district. The major target was people who had been fighting in the guerrilla war and those who lived in the Internally Displaced People's camps (IDP). This is because these were the people who had been affected by the war and were predominately involved in the rehabilitation and reintegration processes. The respondents were purposively selected in each parish with the help of the chairpersons. It is from these pre-selected parishes where 60 respondents were chosen to represent the two districts.

10 key informants from each parish were purposively selected and interviewed. These were 40 women altogether. This sample included women who had been fighting in the guerrilla war with Kony, and those who lived in the Internally Displaced People's Camps (IDP). The youth and men returnees were 20 persons altogether. This is illustrated in the Table 1.

## **2.2 Data Collection Tools and Methods**

In the parishes, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and observations were used. Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire, administered through face to face interviews with respondents. Closed ended questions were useful in filtering out unnecessary information, guiding the interview and quickening response. The questionnaire captured general information such as age, gender, marital status, how long one lived in the camps or in the bush, in the rehabilitation centre and about the reintegration process period. The people's attitudes and beliefs about the conflict, rehabilitation, the reintegration processes and future plans were also captured. In addition the women's religious experiences were also considered. The data was collected from June to July 2010 and from July to August 2014.

Focus group discussions were conducted in order to get a diversity of answers and experiences especially from the youth and men. This was harmonized in the study. Four focus group discussions, each comprising of 5 youth and 5 men from each parish and totaling to 20 people, were conducted. Participants were selected based on their experience of the war, with a focus on those who actively fought and those who lived in the camps. A guideline was used to discuss the following major topics: life in

the bush with Kony fighting the government army, when one was abducted and his first experience, when one came back from the fighting, life in the camps, life after the war, the rights and dignity of women during and after the war, the reintegration processes and the projects involved and how these are helping in rebuilding people's lives. Questions discussed included; what role did religion play in your lives during and after the war? What was the religious experience while in the bush or in the camps?

Participants' knowledge about the conflict, rehabilitation and the reintegration processes was also utilized. The research was also interested in people's perceptions of the rights, dignity and the ability of women in the peace-building and reconciliation processes. Do people acknowledge and appreciate women's efforts in the reintegration and rehabilitation processes? This information was deemed important because it could be used by those involved in the rehabilitation and reintegration processes.

## **2.3 Key Informants Interviews**

Face to face interviews were carried out to seek the views, observations, and experiences of key informants. These included 20 women who had been abducted and had participated in the guerrilla war and 20 women, from the four parishes, who had lived in the Internally Displaced People's Camps (IDPs). The women who had directly participated in the guerrilla war were asked to narrate their experiences in the bush, and how they had escaped from Kony's army. Those who had escaped attribute this to God's mercy, care and protection. They were also asked to talk about their experiences when they came back and in the rehabilitation centers and how they were integrated back into the community. The women who had lived in the camps were asked to share about their experiences and how they had got back into their communities. They were also asked to talk about the reintegration and rehabilitation processes and how these have helped them or not. What life is like in the communities after the war and the lessons learned.

## **2.4 Observations**

Direct observations involved viewing the rehabilitation centers, like the Center for children in vulnerable situations (CCNS) in Lira and the World Vision Center in Gulu. Observation of reintegration projects like the counseling and therapeutic centers were also undertaken.

Observation provided better information than reports from other researchers and other people. The researcher visited several Churches to see whether some of the victims of war were interested in coming to attend and thank God for their lives.

## **2.5 Data Analysis**

Data analysis was qualitative. Data was categorized under particular themes and analyzed in line with the objectives of the research. Tentative themes were identified namely: the rights and dignity of women during and after the war, and women acting as fighters, peace builders and reconcilers. Sections were organized in answer to the following questions: What role did religion play in the lives of former victims of war and those who had worked hard to bring about peace in that area? Were their efforts recognized and appreciated by their communities and other people? How did culture act as an empowerment or a hindrance to women's progress in that place? During data analysis and discussion, these themes were either confirmed or rejected and new ideas established.

The researcher found out the following: the women who had been in the bush fighting with Kony and had had children were not fully accepted by their families. They were still being stigmatized. One of them in a face to face interview said that her people had said that the child did not belong to their clan and asked her to take the child to its father's clan (Apio Mary, not real name). The women who had been living in the Internally Displaced People's Camps had become heads of families because their husbands had been away fighting. One such woman said that her husband had got killed in the war therefore she is now the head of the family, (Ongoni Rose, not real name). At the time of the research, other women were busy involved in petty trade to fend for their families. A few of the young women had gone back to school and were being sponsored by some Organizations like World Vision. Some of the women counselors were still following their clients in the villages where they were presently living.

## **2.6 Ethical Consideration**

The researcher obtained an introduction letter from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Committee, Makerere University asking for permission from the Minister in charge

of the Greater Northern Region to allow the researcher to carry out research in Gulu and Lira Districts. In addition to this the researcher had forms of Informed Consent which had to be filled by each participant. The people who did not know how to read and write were helped by the chairpersons in the area.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1 Challenges Women Faced during the War**

Many women in northern Uganda have been victims of war in different ways. For example, many young girls had been abducted by Kony and recruited into his army. One of the obvious examples is that of the Aboke girls from St. Mary's College. This is a Girls' Senior Secondary School in Lira District, northern Uganda. Els De Temmerman refers to the incident as follows:

“On 9<sup>th</sup> October 1996, one hundred and thirty-nine girls were abducted by the rebels from St. Mary's College. The Deputy Headmistress Sr. Rachele followed the rebels and was able to rescue 109 girls, but the other 30 girls were left behind with the rebels. Those who remained with the rebels suffered a lot and some of them were killed, others got pregnant and became the rebel commanders' wives. Some of these girls like Ellen and Esther escaped because they did not want to become Kony's Commanders' wives as others were forced to be wives of rebels” [8].

Discussing this incident in a face-to-face interview, one woman in Lira said that this had been one of the most terrifying moments of her life. When she heard of it, she had just left that school after her Senior Four, she could have been taken by Kony, she saw God's saving power in it, (Ononi Jane, not real name). The girls who were not rescued were recruited into the army and subjected to harsh living conditions in the bush, defilement, rape and early marriages, leave alone losing the opportunity to go to school. Thus, their lives were shuttered. Under these conditions, these girls dignity was abused. For example, they were forced to kill people in the villages so as to steal food and weapons for the fighters. They endured many hardships like walking long distances and being slave wives of Kony's Officials.

**Table 1. Data collection in Counties, Sub-Counties and Parishes in Gulu and Lira districts**

District	County	Sub-County	Parish
Gulu	Achwa	Peci	Kirombe - 15 people 10 women, 5 youth Techo - 15 people 10 women, 5 men
Lira	Lira	Oqur	Omito - 15 people 10 women, 5 youth Amuca - 15 people 10 women, 5 men

In a face to face interview, one Rose Omona (not real name) describes her experience of being gang-raped by the LRA rebels under a tree. She had gotten pregnant and gave birth to a baby boy. She narrates the story of how she tied the baby's umbilical cord using a thread from her hair braids. She described her emotional turmoil and the fact that she almost threw away her baby, in ways that reveal the extent of suffering and abuse the abductees went through psychologically.

On February 27, 2005 the *Monitor* (Ugandan popular newspaper) reported that,

“A gang of marauding rebels mutilated eight women in Ngomoromo, Kitgum district recently, that one of the Government Officials condemned this as a heinous crime against humanity perpetuated by elements opposed to the peaceful resolution of the conflict in Northern Uganda.” [9].

Another incident occurred in Adjumani, one of the districts in the northern part of the country, in 2005. Nandutu and Goli, the reporters of *Monitor Newspaper* said that,

“On the Women’s day March 8, the government officials had assured the people in the northern Uganda that there were enough forces to ensure security in that part of Uganda, but on March 11 at midnight the rebels attacked Dzaipi, one of the villages. The rebels hacked six people to death, burnt 76 houses and left the whole village in disarray. The attack left 490 people displaced from their homes with no food or property.” [10] This kind of suffering of the civilians in the villages prompted the government to put people in concentrated camps which could be easily guarded. But even there suffering continued for there were never enough resources or even space in these camps.

Apart from the atrocities and abuse of dignity women suffered under the direct hand of the

rebels, those women in the concentration camps also suffered in many ways. There were never enough basic needs in the camps and often when food or clothing was not enough the mothers would sacrifice their share.

The report by “Save the Children Denmark” relates that;

“In that conflict women and children make up the most vulnerable affected population. It was estimated that in northern Uganda about 1-2 million people had been displaced and lived in Internally Displaced People’s Camps (IDP) Women and children who were made up an estimated 80% population of all displaced peoples, [11].

AIDS was another source of suffering for the women. Women in the Camp environment were very susceptible to AIDS because of the high level of moral breakdown in a war situation. Some young women resorted to prostitution for survival and hence contracted HIV/AIDS.

One of the women the researcher interviewed had AIDS which she contracted while living in the IDP camp. She said that her husband had been abducted by Kony’s soldiers and she had been left alone with three young children to fend for. A UPDF soldier who looked after her and her children demanded for sex and she found herself giving in. Even the soldier died later in the war and now she is living alone again with her children, but this time sick with AIDS. She is being treated by TASO one of the organizations caring for people with AIDS (Mary Salome, not her real name).

Some organizations from outside Uganda, beside the local ones, are still engaged in the rehabilitation and peace building processes in northern Uganda today. Many women are part of these organizations and are actively involved in the reintegration rehabilitation processes in northern Uganda.

### **3.2 Women as Peace-makers**

In the reintegration process, women have proved very instrumental. For example, Betty Bigombe a Ugandan woman tried to broker peace between the LRA and the government of Uganda for more than two decades. She was involved in the negotiation and mediation efforts between the government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army. After holding some peace talks with rebels, she came to the conclusion that the Government's policy of 'talk and fight' (this means that the government Army continued fighting while negotiations were going on), was the major stumbling block to her efforts. Sadly however, Bigombe's efforts were hampered by mistrust between the two rivals. Bigombe said that,

"there was need for confidence building on both sides before the peace process could move forward and have a meaningful solution." [12].

This means that the government did not fully recognize her efforts.

In a face-to-face interview one woman in Gulu, when asked about her experience of war and whether women in the region had worked to bring peace, said that "Women like Betty Bigombe has worked hard to try and bring peace in the area but her work is not valued much because she is a woman." (Acan Cathy, not real name). This situation is confirmed by women who in a conference discussed the "Role of religious women in peace-building. They said that,

"Women involved in peace-building around the world often draw inspiration and support from religious sources and organizations. However, little attention has been paid to these actors and the religious dimension of women's work for peace, even though the role of religion for peace in conflict and peace-building has received greater attention in recent years, as has the role of women in promoting peace. This is largely due to the relative invisibility of their efforts. Across religious traditions, women are often marginalized in formal religious spaces and rarely hold leadership positions, they do not receive recognition." [13].

Women's ability to reach across lines of difference in tense environments, lead nonviolent

protests, mobilize communities, as well as engage with the theological aspects of gender roles in peace, holds the promise to change. In northern Uganda, religious organizations have also been involved in peace-building work still through women.

One such campaign was done by the Association formed by parents whose children had been abducted by the rebels. This Association known as Concerned Parents Association, is based in Lira under the leadership of Mrs. Angelina Acheng Atyam. Angelina's daughter, Charlotte was one of the Aboke girls who were abducted in 1996. [8] In a face-to-face conversation with Angelina in July 2014, she said that inside her the spirit was always urging her not to keep quiet like many other parents had done, but to have her voice heard loud and clear. She knew that that was the only way her daughter and many others would be saved. She, along with Sr. Rachele and other parents of abducted daughters formed an Association which helped to advocate for government intervention for the release of their daughters.

Angelina said that the Association was also helped by the Mennonite Central, a Christian Organization from the U.S.A., who sent representatives to the Association. These representatives had a meeting with the members of the Association and asked them the type of help the members needed. The parents wanted to be trained to become peace-builders and trauma healers. Mennonite Central responded by sending professionals who worked with the parents in forming local small support groups and training them. Currently there are more than seventy small groups at village level who are busy working with the ex-soldier children, most of whom are girls. These parents help the returnees to become committed to non-violence because military solutions, as has been demonstrated by the northern Uganda war, never solve problems but instead worsen the situation. The association recognizes that rejection of the military violence must be accompanied by sincere forgiveness and commitment to work for peace.

The success of the above association demonstrates the power of grass-root organizations in peace building. The association had started in Lira but soon spread to Apach, Kitgum, Pader and Gulu districts. Parents, especially women have done a good job in this area. It is said that some of the returnees who have undergone the training are also trying to

help others. It is possible that peace springing from the grass-root members will be lasting. Although this organization did and is still doing well in rehabilitating the people, other organizations have also come in to help the victims of war. The war is over but many people are still carrying scars of it. This is confirmed by the report made at the meeting of Women in Religious peace-building who said that,

“Women are particularly active at the grassroots level, commonly approaching peace from a broad perspective, including development, education, and social well-being.” [14].

### **3.3 What is Happening in Northern Uganda Today?**

The Government Agents of Uganda, the NGOs, the researchers and the local people are involved in rehabilitation and reintegration programs in northern Uganda. For example, Center for Children in Vulnerable Situations (CCNS) is a psychosocial support regional center in Northern Uganda working among children. This NGO runs a pilot project which focuses on development and elaboration of psychosocial and psychotherapeutic support for war-affected youngsters and their families in Lira District, [15].

Grace Akello did her research in Gulu and wrote a paper on: “Reintegration of former child soldiers in northern Uganda: Coming to terms with children’s agency and accountability”, and published it in: *Intervention: International Journal of Medical Health, Psychosocial Work and Counseling in Areas of Armed Conflict*. This is what the paper captures:

“Since 1995 two NGOs have been responsible for the reintegration of formerly abducted children and youth. One is the Gulu Support the Children Organization, a local NGO facilitated by Save the Children in Uganda (SciU) that bases its rehabilitation and reintegration process on traditional Acholi ways which involves clan Leaders and traditional cleansing ceremonies. The second is World Vision (WV), an International Christian relief and development Organization. Its format for counseling and reintegration has its bases in Christian ideas about confession and repentance of sins and healing by forgiveness” [16].

Many such Organizations are involved in the rehabilitation and reintegration of formerly abducted persons and those who lived in the Internally Displaced People’s camps (IDP), in Northern Uganda. There is another Organization known as ‘Invisible Children’, partnering with World Vision Uganda, which has set a program that uses different facets to dramatically reduce LRA violence. They are doing this by tackling the problem from all sides through a comprehensive approach of addressing both immediate needs and long term effects of war (invisiblechildren.com/program/rehabilitation-project 2014). The members of this Organization have introduced several projects such as: “The village Savings and Loan Association,” (VSLA). This has helped the people of northern Uganda to take control of their personal finances; Each member of the group saves, takes out loans, repays loans with interest and invests. Some members have been able to pay school fees for their children others have built houses while others have been able to grow food crops for their families. Another project is the Wash project which provides rural communities in northern Uganda with access to safe drinking water, improving sanitation and hygiene of the community members. [17] These organizations are making an impact by providing the most essential basic needs of the people in that area.

### **4. SUMMARY**

In this article it is evident that in modern warfare both women and men are active participants. The idea of looking at men as perpetrators of war and women as victims is somehow inadequate. For example, in Kony’s war in northern Uganda, some women actively participated. However, it is also true that many women were victims of this war through rape, injury and death. In many cases, the contribution of the ex-women soldiers was not recognized and appreciated instead they were rejected by their family members and regarded as murderers and prostitutes. Many of the children born in the bush were not accepted by the communities. As a result, most of them now live in abject poverty.

Many Ugandan women acted as peace-makers. One of them, Betty Bigombe Minister of Disaster Preparedness at the time, tried to initiate peace talks between the NRA rebels and the Government of Uganda but she did not succeed because the government used the policy of ‘talk and fight’, making negotiations impossible. Another person who played an important role



was Sr. Rachele, the deputy headmistress of St. Mary's Aboke. She pursued the rebels who had abducted 139 students from the school, negotiated for their release, and managed to have 109 girls released. Other women wrote about the war situation in northern Uganda, trying to bring to the fore the horrible atrocities that were taking place in that area. This helped to get the attention of the local and international communities and as a result, many NGOs came in to save the situation by providing food relief, medical care and even shelter. Much as women are still marginalized, there is evidence of their instrumentality as demonstrated in the post-war experience in northern Uganda and other similar experiences in the world.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Women like Angelina and the Concerned Parents Association have become a voice of the voiceless both at national and International levels. They have formed groups to sensitize people to get committed to non-violent means of resolving conflict. The power of grass-root organization proves that working with people at this level can help achieve their goals. The women in northern Uganda have been deprived of their human dignity, but their experiences through the war have also changed their outlook on life. The woman-defined theology advocates for liberation of both women and men because they are all children of God. Oppression, wherever it is found, is evil and goes against God's will. War, especially guerrilla warfare, like the one in northern Uganda, dehumanizes people both men and women. There is need for reconciliation and to restore wholeness, both for human beings and creation. Where the dignity of women and their human rights are abused in war as it happened in northern Uganda, there is need to be restored through education, and sensitization. The reintegration and rehabilitation processes that are in place in northern Uganda are trying to do this but the communities need to learn to forgive and accept the returnees back into their midst. Culture is not static, it changes with time and this is the time to go with what is of most beneficial to the young and future generations.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Many other researchers have written on War in northern Uganda but few on the respect for the dignity of women.

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