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Sharing victim-centered views on justice and reconciliation in Uganda



A publication of
Justice and
Reconciliation
Project
Issue 8, September 2014



Transitional justice
An opportunity for
regional reconciliation

Voices

Sharing victim-centered views on justice and reconciliation in Uganda

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Voices: Sharing victim-centered views on justice and reconciliation in Uganda
A publication of the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP)
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The Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP) has played a key role in transitional justice (TJ) in Uganda since 2005 through seeking to understand and explain the interests, needs, concerns and views of communities affected by conflict. JRP promotes locally-sensitive and sustainable peace in Africa's Great Lakes region by focusing on the active involvement of grassroots communities in local-level transitional justice.

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On Wednesday, June 24, 1981, the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) attacked civilians who had taken refuge at Ombaci College, four kilometres from Arua town in Uganda's West Nile sub-region. The "Ombaci Massacre" eventually claimed the lives of close to 100 people and left countless wounded. In 2013, the Justice and Reconciliation Project began conducting research for a report which would document the events of that day, its aftermath and the recommendations of the survivors and their descendants.

It Was Only the Gun Speaking, With a Pool of Blood Flowing (see an excerpt on page 18), JRP's 20th Field Note, details how today the remnants of this massacre still exist for many of the survivors of the massacre: the children that were orphaned on that day live with lost opportunities for education, financial and emotional support, while survivors who lost property continue to seek compensation. Many survivors also suffer from health complications and injuries. As such, it is evident that reparations form a significant part of the call for redress for survivors of the Ombaci massacre, however a recurring theme that surfaced among them was the call for reconciliation and dialogue among the different peoples of northern Uganda. Many witnesses of the massacre have expressed the belief that the massacre was an act of revenge by the majority Acholi UNLA for the treatment the Acholi people had received at the hands of Idi Amin's soldiers when he was in power. This was also reflected during a dialogue held at the Ombaci Catholic Mission, as part of the annual commemoration of the massacre in June this year, many speeches by survivors, community members and political leaders called for reconciliation and dialogue between the people of Acholi and West Nile.

This issue of *Voices* magazine examines the importance, role and implementation of regional reconciliation in the vein of that which was called for in Ombaci in northern Uganda's transitional justice. Aside from Ombaci, the need for regional reconciliation in Uganda has been expressed in places like Tubur sub-county, Soroti District, where Teso women that the Women's Advocacy Network engaged with in a dialogue as part as their outreach called for apologies from the most Acholi WAN members before they could dialogue with them. Read reflections on this from the perspective of WAN and JRP on pages 10 and 11.

Read about how regional reconciliation can take a more cross-border approach in "Cross-border transitional justice and regional reconciliation in Africa" on page 6. In "Territorial peace" in Northern Uganda: Insight from Colombia", Claudia Navas reflects on the possibility of a regional approach to reconciliation based on the Colombian approach on page 14.

The Research Corner is a new section of *Voices*. It highlights on-going transitional research on transitional justice and peacebuilding northern Uganda by researchers and students. This issue features reflections by Canadian researcher Jesse Jenkinson on possible gaps for research in an already research heavy area. Read her thoughts on page 16.

Thank you for reading this issue of *Voices*. As always, your "voice" is welcome – feel free to share your opinions on this and future issues of the magazine by writing to voices@justiceandreconciliation.com or Justice and Reconciliation Project, P.O. Box 1216, Gulu, Uganda. -- ORYEM NYEKO



“[They] said there must be rebels in the college and that they didn't believe that only civilians were occupying the college ... As soon as they entered the college that is when they started killing people.”

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Contributors

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Your views!

Lebu Patrick On 24/6/2014 a memorial service was held for victims and survivors of OMBACI massacre of 1981 attended by thousands of mourners. In the event, a field note dossier about the 33 year old massacre was launched by JRP at St. Kizito parish, Ombaci. However, the names of some people buried there were missing. I was shot at with them but God forbid they passed on and [were] buried there. One other passed on at St. Luke's Hospital, Angal. I feel it is a good process to heal this old wound which has haunted us victims and survivors for so long. God bless the work of JRP!

Share your views

Voices magazine welcomes your views on transitional justice and reconciliation in Uganda. To contribute to future issues write to voices@justiceandreconciliation.com or **Justice and Reconciliation Project, P.O. Box 1216, Gulu, Uganda**. Make sure to like our facebook page www.facebook.com/pages/justice-and-reconciliation-project or follow us on twitter [@JRP_Uganda](https://twitter.com/JRP_Uganda).

The national transitional justice policy: An opportunity for regional reconciliation

ORYEM NYEKO AND CLAIRE KAHUNDE

THE NATIONAL TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE POLICY is a framework of the government of Uganda that seeks to provide mechanisms that will ensure lasting peace in Uganda. The policy is currently in its fifth draft and is being spearheaded by the Justice, Law and Order Sector (JLOS) working group. The policy is a hybrid of restorative and retributive approaches to justice and interventions that are hoped to foster sustainable peace and meet the justice, accountability and reconciliation needs of victims of conflict in Uganda.

While the policy takes steps to provide for the transitional justice in the country on a national scale, it can also provide for mechanisms which will address an often neglected component of transitional justice – regional reconciliation. This article assesses the role that the TJ Policy can play, and the opportunities it provides, in this regard.

The policy recognises the complexities of “victimhood” for conflict-affected communities in Uganda by providing that it is cognisant “of the fact that victims in situations of conflict may have also been perpetrators, and makes recommendations for its consideration”. Although recognising the victim-perpetrator dynamic in conflict is important, it is not the only aspect of the status of persons affected by conflict in Uganda that needs to be addressed. Because conflict has played a significant role in the past few decades in the northern region of Uganda on a wide scale, victims have been spread across region both geographically and ethnically. At the same time, perpetrators have often been attributed to one particular area or ethnicity. Often, victims express feelings of being targeted by other groups which has fostered feelings of blame and stereotypes, a challenge the TJ policy also needs to address.

The policy also places emphasis on public participation and the value of community driven transitional justice processes. This is a valuable step in the direction of fostering regional reconciliation as it should ensure that different regions of Uganda will participate in the processes that the policy provides for. It also underscores the value of the all-inclusiveness of the policy. Other significant provisions include the assertion that formal justice processes will ensure that witnesses are protected and all victims participate in the proceedings. Additionally, the

policy also seeks to remove barriers for access to justice in a non-discriminatory and all-encompassing manner. All of these are vital in ensuring that all regions are represented in transitional justice processes that can foster reconciliation among them.

The TJ Policy recognises traditional justice mechanisms as a tool for conflict resolution by providing for the Government to “put in place safe guards that will recognise and protect rights of parties that seek redress”. The recognition accredited to tradition will go a long way in encouraging the use of inclusive and restorative cultural processes among the different communities, which will ultimately promote reconciliation among peoples of the different regions across Uganda.

In the same vein, the establishment of a national truth telling process, as proposed by the TJ policy, will give victims of gross human rights violations and abuses and the society at large the opportunity to elaborate on the varying perceptions, experiences and conceptions of conflict in Uganda. This is an opportunity for regional reconciliation in that it will provide a platform for the misperceptions, rumours and myths that may have contributed to any lack of regional reconciliation in Uganda, and also for the presentation of the similarities in the experiences of conflict of victims in the different regions. It will also dispel with any sense of mistrust that may have existed among different communities.

Even though it does not explicitly recognise the role that regional reconciliation plays in the larger picture of transitional justice, the fact that in its introductory sections it recognises that Ugandans “aspire to live peacefully with citizens of other countries and in harmony within their social, cultural and ethnic diversity” is also very important. As such the transitional justice policy could potentially have a significant and far-reaching effect as far as regional reconciliation is concerned. If implemented, the processes and institutions it seeks to set up will enable consensus and collective problem solving, all of which are vital in reconciliation from a regional perspective. □

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Claire Kahunde is a Legal Officer with JRP's Gender Justice department and Oryem Nyeko is the Communications Officer for JRP.

Cross-border transitional justice and regional reconciliation in Africa



LINDSAY McCLAIN OPIYO

ACCORDING TO the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation's (IJR) working definition, political reconciliation requires at least four elements from affected parties: recognising shared interdependence; engaging in genuine dialogue about the past, present and future; creating democratic spaces to disagree; and working jointly to address past socio-economic exploitation and injustice.

Most often, reconciliation is viewed from a local or national lens. However, last year, IJR, together with the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) organised a regional consultation and policy workshop with senior TJ practitioners and key governmental and intergovernmental institutions from the continent to begin exploring *if* and *how* tenets of national reconciliation might be "scaled up" and applied in a regional way.

Conceptualising Regional Reconciliation

There is growing recognition that much of Africa's peace and security challenges can be linked to regional conflict systems. Case studies—such as that of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the states and civilians of Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Republic of South Sudan, and Central African Republic (CAR)—vividly demonstrate how seemingly localised episodes of violence often spill across ethnic, political, social and cultural borders and boundaries. In fact, more than half of violent conflicts in Africa can be linked to conflicts in neighboring states (Maina, G. & Razia, W. 2012. "The Mano River Union: Regional Peacebuilding – A Collective Initiative by Various Actors." In *New Routes: A Journal of Peace Research and Action*, Vol. 17, 20). As such, "The regionalisation of violent conflict, therefore, calls for a coordinated regional approach to reconciliation, if these countries and their communities are to be stabilised." A central question and challenge for the transitional justice (TJ) field, then, becomes: *instead of limiting our solutions to nations or areas within a state, how can we adopt a more expansive, holistic perspective that is regional and cross-border in nature?*

Formal processes would include those facilitated by states or inter-governmental bodies, such as the AU, UN, SADC, COMESA, or ECOWAS. Such inter-governmental institutions could oversee and coordinate regional processes for reconciliation, catalysing and/or complementing the TJ initiatives of states under their jurisdiction.

Envisioning Regional Mechanisms for Reconciliation

From the aforementioned consultation, it became clear that, like in national TJ processes, there are two distinct types possibilities for regional reconciliation mechanisms: formal and informal.

Formal processes would include those facilitated by states or inter-governmental bodies, such as the African Union (AU), United Nations (UN), Southern African Development Community (SADC), International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), or the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Such inter-governmental institutions could oversee and coordinate regional processes for reconciliation, catalysing and/or complementing the TJ initiatives of states under their jurisdiction. Unfortunately, such bodies do not, as of yet, have explicit policies on fostering regional reconciliation, and this could be one area for further advocacy.

Informal processes would operate outside of state or inter-governmental structures, and likely heavily involve civil society in coordination and implementation.

Like ongoing informal processes in Uganda, such as the *Bearing Witness* project JRP is implementing in Atiak sub-county on community truth-telling (see page 12), informal regional reconciliation initiatives could involve actors from various conflict divides in processes that fulfill the aforementioned tenets of reconciliation, such as engaging in dialogue on the past and working together to redress past injustices.

Both formal and informal processes alike would need infrastructure and capacity to operationalise regional reconciliation. This could include designing policies, deploying resources, monitoring implementation progress and coordinating the media and other actors. Civil society could be mobilised to create net-

works for facilitating and advocating for regional reconciliation.

Key Recommendations for Regional Reconciliation

Through the consultation and participants' shared thinking on the way forward for actualising regional reconciliation initiatives, a multitude of recommendations were generated for states, inter-governmental organisations and civil society. For instance, unless regional reconciliation is adopted as a strategic objective of states' foreign policy, it shall be difficult for states to develop and maintain the necessary infrastructure to implement regional processes. Furthermore, internal policies and processes for justice and reconciliation, such as Uganda's Justice, Law and Order Sector (JLOS), must integrate a regional lens in their national work, such that the draft TJ policy and other guiding policies and programmes approach justice and reconciliation in Uganda in a manner which invites

Case studies—such as that of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the states and civilians of Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Republic of South Sudan, and Central African Republic (CAR)—vividly demonstrate how seemingly localised episodes of violence often spill across ethnic, political, social and cultural borders and boundaries.

and nurtures the shared narratives of their neighbors, who also experienced the conflicts, as well as Ugandans who experienced conflict outside its borders.

For the AU, who is currently drafting a draft TJ policy framework, this is a timely opportunity to incorporate a focus on regional reconciliation. The AU and other inter-governmental bodies also have the ability to ensure that regional lens are adopted in peace deals and agreements, such as the ongoing peace process on South Sudan taking place in Addis Ababa. Inter-governmental bodies that have a mandate on economic development, such as SADC or COMESA, have the opportunity to apply a regional reconciliation lens to their work, by adopting policies that

encourage business and people to move across political borders and engage with "the other."

For civil society, TJ-related organisations should consider expanding their networks regionally, in an effort to generate momentum for advocacy for regional reconciliation processes and to connect victims and grassroots actors across borders. Furthermore, as bodies with expertise in information generation and dissemination, as well as capacity-building of actors at many levels, civil society is well placed to drive agendas and lobby for informal and formal regional reconciliation.

Conclusion

With more actors acknowledging the interconnectedness of Africa's conflicts, there is a pressing opportunity to challenge and expand the mainstream discourse on justice and reconciliation on the continent. Rather than limit our TJ processes to nation-states alone, we must imagine new

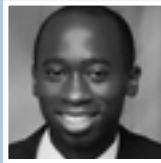
ways to engage conflict-affected communities in processes to holistically address past wrongs and create non-violent, interconnected and interdependent futures. According to scholar Peter Wallensteen, "...the lack of a regional framework indicates the absence of shared thinking" ("Regional Peacebuilding: A New Challenge." In *New Routes: A Journal of Peace Research and Action*, Vol.17, 4).

As organisations like IJR and JRP begin to explore possibilities for inter-regional and regional reconciliation in Uganda and the Great Lakes region, I look forward to creating synergy and more moments of shared thinking around regional frameworks for justice and reconciliation. □

Lindsay McClain Opiyo is the Team Leader for Gender Justice at the Justice and Reconciliation Project. In 2013, she spent six months in Cape Town, South Africa, learning from the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation's (IJR) "Justice and Reconciliation in Africa (JRA)" programme. This article is based off of a policy brief co-authored with IJR's Dr. Tim Muriithi. To read the full brief, please visit: <http://www.ijr.org.za/publications/pb14.php>.

TJ Timeline

JESSE MUGERO



A glance at recent gender-related transitional justice developments.

Leaders want ADF victims paid before endorsing Museveni

A SECTION OF NRM leaders in Kichwamba sub-county in Kabarole District will endorse Museveni as party's sole presidential candidate for the 2016 general elections on condition that he compensates the victims and families of the 1998 Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) rebel attacks.

On June 8th 1998, the ADF torched the Uganda Technical College at Kichwamba in Burahya County before abducting more than 100 students and burning 80 others beyond recognition.

Daily Monitor, 14th May 2014.

Joseph Kony's son said to lead LRA

MILITARY INTELLIGENCE collected by the African Union Regional Task Force in the Central African Republic (CAR) shows that Salim Saleh (Joseph Kony's son, said to be 22 years old) is now in charge of the rebel outfit. He is said to be as volatile as his father. It has also been found that the LRA still maintains contact with the Government of Sudan.

Daily Monitor 17th May 2014

Acholi leaders call for extension of PRDP - 27th May 2014

LEADERS IN ACHOLI sub region have requested the government and donors to extend the Peace, Recovery and Development Programme (PRDP), saying the second phase of the programme has not been fully utilised. The programme is due to end next January. This resolution was reached at a meeting convened by Joint Acholi Sub-region Leaders Forum (JASLF) to review successes, challenges and gaps of PRDP 2/ NUSAF 2 implementation in the northern region.

Daily Monitor, 27th May 2014

Ex- Teso commission demands pay from government - 28th May 2014

MEMBERS OF THE PRESIDENTIAL Commission for Teso (PCT) are seeking for audience with the president over unpaid allowances. The PCT was instrumental in ending the Uganda People's Army (UPA) uprising against the National Resistance Army in Teso sub-region.

Daily Monitor, 28th May 2014

Ombaci Massacre of 1981 commemorated

ON 24TH JUNE 2014, the community in Ombaci held memorial prayers for members they lost on June 24th 1981. That afternoon JRP launched a report called *'It Was Only the Gun Speaking, With A*

Pool of Blood Flowing' detailing the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) attack on civilians who had taken refuge at the Ombaci Catholic Mission in Arua.

Justice and Reconciliation Project, 3 July 2014

Set up truth and reconciliation commission, Arua leaders say

LEADERS IN ARUA district used the annual commemoration of the 1981 Ombaci massacre to renew calls for national dialogue over past injustices. The survivors of the massacre, who number up to 300, are demanding compensation and psychological help to recover from the trauma they went through.

Daily Monitor, 26th June 2014.

Lamogi clan chief demands for compensation for NRA war victims

LAMOGI CLAN MEMBERS in Amuru District are demanding to meet President Museveni over a 1986 massacre allegedly committed by the National Resistance Army (NRA). It is alleged that over 32 civilians were killed on suspicion that they were former fighters of the Tito Okello Lutwa's government in Lamogi sub-county.

Saturday Monitor, 28th June 2014

Gulu violence victims get home

ACTION AID REPORTED to have established a centre for victims of Gender Based Violence in Gulu. It will provide health, legal as well as counseling services.

New Vision, 22nd July 2014

U.S congress wants LRA advisor mission extended

AT LEAST 22 CONGRESS representatives have signed a letter urging President Barrack Obama to further extend the stay of 100 U.S soldiers hunting down LRA fighters.

Red Pepper, 24th July 2014

Government to appeal Shs. 2.9 trillion compensation

THE UGANDAN GOVERNMENT is reported to intend to appeal a decision delivered by High Court Justice Byamukama Mugenyi in July ordering the government to compensate 69, 457 war victims under the Lango War Claimants Association.

The Red Pepper, 2nd August 2014. □



Bishop Sabino Odoki of Arua Archdiocese leads the commemoration of the Ombaci Massacre of 1981 in Arua, 24 June 2004.



An apology for peace

Reflections from an inter-regional dialogue between Women's Advocacy Network members and women in Teso sub-region

NANCY APIYO

A GROUP OF WOMEN AND MEN sat in a shed that serves as both a local restaurant and a meeting point for Achuna Ogulai Post Test Women's Club group in Tubur, Soroti district Teso Sub region. This was during an exchange visit between the group and Women's Advocacy Network members who are dominantly Acholi. The exchange visit was to develop networks so as to exchange information about strategies and tactics for advocacy on current issues that war-affected women face. It also provided an opportunity for the women to share their experiences as well as find common ground and understanding.

Tension rose when women began to share their experiences during the conflicts in the region. Women from Tubur shared how the Lord's Resistance Army rebels, whom they described as sons of Acholiland, raped and beat them and killed their relatives. Women from Acholi listened as the rebels were described by the other victims as sons of Acholi. In the past, there have been instances where people from Teso have been reported to blame Acholi for the atrocities that were committed and the ongoing consequences of the conflict, such as HIV/AIDS so it was not a surprise that the women in Teso

held similar feelings.

"We apologise for whatever happened, forgive us," was the response from the WAN members.

Women from Tubur seemed satisfied with the apology and the atmosphere was calm again. They believed it was necessary for WAN members to apologise since some of the perpetrators were women and the fact that Joseph Kony, the leader of the LRA, is an Acholi. "The girls who were abducted committed atrocities in this area. Some of us were beaten by women and women should also ask for forgiveness on behalf of Kony," one of them said.

We usually do not interfere when women are sharing their experiences but this was a one off. I was itching in my seat. I had to ask WAN members why they apologised.

I needed to understand why the discussion took this direction. We usually do not interfere when women are sharing their experiences but this was a one off. I was itching in my seat. I had to ask WAN members why they apologised. They explained that it was okay for them to apologise for what they did not do or have any idea about for the sake of peace. "It is for the sake of peace and reconciliation," one of them said.

It was clear at this moment that the two groups of women could not go on with networking and collaborating for advocacy for justice and accountability of the gender crimes committed on them without burying the

hatchet and settling the tension that had boiled between the Acholi and Itesot for all this time.

After deliberating for some time the two groups decided to work together to ensure that there is reconciliation between the two regions as their first collaboration. They planned to organise community outreaches in the two regions using songs and dramas to breed room for reconciliation in the communities. "Reconciliation is more important than everything else. There is need to have reconciliation between the Itesot and Acholi in order to have peace so that we can live as brother and even intermarry," said the women from Teso.

I had known women for making sacrifices and going

an extra mile for the sake of peace. It had never crossed my mind that women would willingly apologise for what they did not do. It was my first time to experience women taking up a mantle such as this. It is common for people not to apologise because they do not want to accept what happened or be held accountable. However for the sake of peace just like the WAN members we should bell the cat and apologise. □

Nancy Apiyo is a Project Officer with JRP's Gender Justice department.

Evelyn Amony speaks during an exchange visit held between war-affected northern Ugandan women in June 2014. Credit: Oryem Nyeko.



Why we apologised



EVELYN AMONY is the chairperson for the Women's Advocacy Network (WAN), a grassroots organisation of war-affected women supported by the Justice and Reconciliation Project. In 2014, WAN visited Tubur sub-county in Soroti District as part of an exchange visit with the objective of engaging with women from that area. These are Evelyn's thoughts on the visit.

WHEN WE VISITED Teso sub-region in April 2014, we hoped to share what women in Acholi sub-region had gone through and what they were still going through so that we would find ways to carry out advocacy on the challenges that women continue to face as a result of war. Surprisingly women in Teso did not welcome this. Instead they looked at us, as Acholi women, as the cause of all the problems they went through and that they are still going through since Joseph Kony is an Acholi.

I immediately introduced myself as a formerly abducted person who had gone through a lot while in

captivity but who had forgiven all those who abducted me. As a leader, I apologised before the Itesot women for what happened to them as a result of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) war on behalf of the Acholi because I felt that it was necessary for me to do so to have should be peace with them. The women in Tubur take reconciliation to be the most pressing thing to be done before anything else can take place.

After the apology the Itesot women acknowledged our visit and welcomed us in their region and we shared experiences. They said that they had forgiven the Acholi women and acknowledged that all the regions in the north had suffered and that there was need for regional reconciliation.

We have learned that war does not look at a specific tribe but people within the area that it occurred. There is need for reconciliation to take place in all regions and people should know that justice has to be accorded to each and every person irrespective of where they are from.

They said that they had forgiven the Acholi women and acknowledged that all the regions in the north had suffered and that there was need for regional reconciliation.

Bearing Witness

Dealing with the past to create a better future


THIS YEAR MARKS THE FIRST TIME a community-based truth-telling process, which directly involves different sectors of the community, has been implemented in northern Uganda. Through Bearing Witness: Dealing With The Past To Create A Better Future, the Justice and Reconciliation Project, with support from USAID SAFE, works with communities in Atiak sub-county in Amuru District to foster social cohesion and reconciliation through a project that involves storytelling and truth-telling dialogues.

Atiak was chosen to be the subject of this groundbreaking truth-telling pilot because of the remnants of an infamous LRA massacre in 1995 and the two-decade long conflict in the region that the sub-county faces. While active conflict has ceased, the wounds of the massacre and the experiences are far from healed. Since the end of the war, the community has been characterised by ongoing trauma, the stigmatisation of formerly abducted children, identity challenges for chil-

dren born in captivity, and the issues arising from the reintegration of former combatants. Like most other conflict-affected communities, Atiak also seeks reparations as well as answers about the fate of those that went missing during the war. The question is how national transitional justice processes can be translated into community-centred approaches that are both relevant to the victims and survivors of the conflict and which address the challenges that they face.

Through Bearing Witness, JRP aims to promote the preservation of conflict memories, healing and reconciliation by creating forums through which communities can share and document their experiences through story-telling and facilitating informal truth-telling processes and dialogues. Because of these sessions, key issues which require interventions to ensure reconciliation and peace in both the community and region have been identified. Victims of conflict and alleged perpetrators have also been able to speak out about their experiences side-by-side. □



A photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, several people are sitting on the ground under the shade of a large, leafy tree. One woman is wearing a yellow and white floral dress, another is in a white shirt and purple skirt, and a man is in a light blue shirt and dark pants, sitting on a wooden chair. Another person is sitting on the ground next to him. In the background, there are more trees, a white vehicle, and a thatched-roof hut. The sky is blue with some clouds.

“I am 72 years old. I was abducted four times by LRA rebels in 1988. If I was not strong enough to endure the difficulties I went through, I would have committed suicide by now.”

A participant during a Truth-telling Dialogue as part of JRP's Bearing Witness project.

Public and private truth-telling dialogues are conducted in 2014 as part of JRP's Bearing Witness project. During truth-telling dialogues, participants share their conflict experiences with a ten member Truth-telling and Reconciliation Committee.

‘Territorial peace’ in northern Uganda: **Insight from Colombia**

CLAUDIA NAVAS

COLOMBIA, A COUNTRY that has gone through more than forty decades of armed conflict, is currently witnessing a peace negotiation between the government and one of the rebel groups, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC, in Spanish). Under the premise “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed” the negotiation table has reached preliminary accords on three of the six points of the agenda which touch the main root causes of the conflict. Despite this progress, there is still much uncertainty about the success of the process since the most sensitive issues for both parties are the last items of the agenda. The government has outlined a peace-building model for the implementation of the agreements once the final accord is signed.

The model called “territorial peace” seeks to create a new alliance between the state and the communities in order to re-build the institutions –understood broadly as the set of practices and norms that regulate the public life and facilitate cooperation and coexistence–, address the specific needs of each territory, and enforce the rights of every citizen equally through bottom-up processes of participatory planning, according to the website of the Colombian president, Juan Manuel Santos. The underlying theory of the model acknowledges that the lack of presence of the state –or its corrupted presence– in some

territories of the country gave birth to and fueled the conflict. Thus, in order to build peace, the model aims to start a dialogue between authorities and communities with the purpose of identifying the characteristics and needs of their territory, and planning responses to those needs. Sergio Jaramillo, one of the proponents of this model within the Colombian government, has described this process as the “joint construction of peace”:

The joint construction of peace requires us to open the regions to new spaces for participation, debate, and peaceful democratic deliberation among people who treat each other as equals in their rights and freedoms –among authorities, communities, victims, farmers, ranchers, entrepreneurs, tradesmen and also reintegrated ex-combatants– to discuss how we are going to implement the things agreed upon.

An excerpt of a speech by Sergio Jaramillo at Externado University on 9 May 2013

Therefore, the joint construction of peace will only begin with the transition phase, and it is envisioned to set the conditions for deep and long-term transformations in those territories. Even though the government has outlined this model very broadly, and it is still unknown how it will be implemented, several national and inter-

The model called “territorial peace” seeks to create a new alliance between the state and the communities in order to re-build the institutions –understood broadly as the set of practices and norms that regulate the public life and facilitate cooperation and coexistence–, address the specific needs of each territory, and enforce the rights of every citizen equally through bottom-up processes of participatory planning.

national NGO's, leaders at the grassroots level, as well as local governments have underscored the potential of this model in achieving sustainable peace.

As in Colombia, the violent conflict in Uganda also has territorial dimensions that need to be identified and addressed in order to prevent a return to overt conflict. The Advisory Consortium on Conflict Sensitivity (ACCS) has provided a very thorough identification of conflict drivers in northern Uganda at the territorial level –by regions, sub-regions, and at the national level– that serves as a starting point (ACCS, *Northern Uganda Conflict Analysis*, 2013). For instance, at the national level, it identifies how economic disparities, resource competition, the politicisation of ethnic identity, human rights abuses, and the North-South divide, to name a few, undermine the sense of national identity, fuel grievances, and limit the capacity of the state to protect the citizens and provide basic services. At the regional level, particularly in northern Uganda, it identifies the specific needs and challenges after the

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Dialogue processes can facilitate non-violent responses to current and future conflicts. For instance, social and political forces such as the leadership of women and youth can be capitalised on in order to build comprehensive and inclusive peace and development interventions.

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cessation of the conflict, such as the land and mineral disputes in Bunyoro, Acholi and Lango, the environmental degradation and inter-ethnic tensions that are affecting Teso, and the overall impact of incomplete or inadequate transitional justice processes. However, although we already know much about the conflict drivers in Northern Uganda, we know less about the drivers of peace and how key relationships could bring the transformation needed in each territory.

While there have been remarkable peacebuilding initiatives in northern Uganda, after eight years of the cessation of the violence, there has not been an effort to congregate all the different voices that during these years have worked and advocated for peace to foster creative reflections and collective processes about how peace and reconciliation can be achieved. This need is not met only by the creation of new institutional/organisational structures, conferences or events; it is about creating ongoing platforms that “provide access and connection between the local and the public sphere” (Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, 2005, p.

52).

Northern Uganda, as a whole, has a great potential for conflict transformation. Dialogue processes can facilitate non-violent responses to current and future conflicts. For instance, social and political forces such as the leadership of women and youth can be capitalised on in order to build comprehensive and inclusive peace and development interventions. The political and cultural influence of traditional authorities can strengthen the legitimacy of a dialogue process and serve as an intermediary with grassroots communities. The NGO's and civil society organisations can foster synergy and cooperation to improve the effectiveness of peace-building interventions and strengthen advocacy for minority groups. The diaspora and other politically relevant actors, such as the private sector, should also participate and provide insights on how to address current challenges. In sum, an inclusive and participatory dialogue process in northern Uganda can maximise the impact of current peace-building efforts and strengthen relationships between key actors in order to prevent an upsurge of violence and to foster structural transformations. Creating such platforms at the regional level could address the gaps of current transitional justice processes and peace-building efforts –such as the Peace and Recovery Development Plan– already identified by the ACCS's and other programme evaluation reports, in effectively engaging the communities in the achievement of peace and fostering reconciliation at all levels. In other words, such platforms could contribute to bring what John Paul Lederach calls “authentic social change”, that is, changes at the “real-life relationships at the level where people have the greatest access and where they perceive they are most directly affected: in their respective communities” (Ibid, p. 56).

The territorial peace model outlined above could be a framework to build the aforementioned platforms for dialogue. The rich forms of authentic leadership already existing within northern Uganda offer a great potential for building such platforms, for creatively thinking about *who* and *what* needs to be changed, and for planning *how* such changes can be fostered. The community-based truth telling and reconciliation dialogues that Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP) is leading in six communities in Atiak (Amuru District) envision a similar process as the territorial peace model suggests. Such dialogues could be replicated in other communities and even in other regions of the country in order to achieve true reconciliation and sustainable peace in Uganda. □

Claudia Navas is an intern with JRP's Documentation Department and a Master's student of International Peace Studies at the Kroc Institute of the University of Notre Dame, Indiana (USA). The author wants to thank Karen Campion and Oryem Nyeko for their insightful feedback and edits on this article.

Introducing The Research Corner

Welcome to The Research Corner. This section of *Voices* magazine aims to highlight on-going transitional justice research in northern Uganda and provide a forum for sharing knowledge in this area. The Research Corner provides an opportunity for researchers to share lessons and insight from the research process, as well as share upcoming research projects.

To contribute email voices@justiceandreconciliation.com.

Identifying research gaps and areas of redundancy.

JESSE JENKINSON



Jesse Jenkinson is a second year PhD student at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto, Canada. She specializes in the Social and Behavioural Health Sciences stream,

and is doing the Collaborative Programs in Global Health, and Public Health Policy. She has a background in International Development, and Community Psychology. Her current research interests lay in northern Uganda and she has spent this past summer gaining a better understanding of the research gaps still exist in the area.

The amount of research that has been conducted on northern Uganda is substantial. Researchers have been visiting the area for decades to examine land conflict, spirits and ceremonies, sexual and gender based violence, reintegration and reconciliation, transitional justice, access to health care, and more. Additionally, the number of NGOs, CBOs, etc., in Gulu District is significant. During the LRA conflict humanitarian and development organizations flocked to Gulu and most have not left. On top of this, dozens of Undergraduate or Masters students arrive each summer to fulfil an internship or placement requisite. At any given time there are dozens of people conducting research in Acholiland.

I, like the others, am interested in conducting research in northern Uganda. In my PhD studies I have thought to highlight the strengths of women in post-conflict northern Uganda. I perceive this to be an under-researched area in academia as current literature overemphasises the portrayal of women as victims. While highlighting women's vic-

timisation is critical, there is a danger of women and girls becoming personified as voiceless victims devoid of agency. This needs to be balanced with research on women's successes and strengths. I also believe in true community-based participatory research where participants have control in determining important topics, research questions, data collection methods, etc. These methods ensure that participants have some power over research being down with/about them. Therefore, making a decision on my research topic while sitting in my office in Canada started to feel hypocritical. I decided it would be best to conduct a feasibility trip and see what others think about my research ideas, well before I start data collection.

This summer, I visited with organizations in Gulu town that work with war-affected communities and former LRA child soldiers. Respondents identified four research gaps that are either not currently being researched or are under researched.

Children born in captivity

There has been little documentation of the numbers of children born in captivity. Reception centres infrequently recorded the number of children born in the captivity and thus this vulnerable group has been largely ignored. These children face stigmatisation in their communities. Often, their fathers (and mothers) committed atrocities and the children bear the brunt of this anger from community members. Likely rejected by their matrilineal clan and, with their fathers often unknown to them, they remain disconnected from their patrilineal clan. This is problematic as the patrilineal system of land division means these children hold no claim to land, and thus little means of livelihoods support. Their identities are multiple: children born in the bush, poor, stigmatised, fatherless, landless, etc. These issues of social exclusion facing today's youth have potential implications for the future as children who feel like they don't belong may turn to armed forces as a means of identity formation (Betancourt, T., et al. *Psychosocial adjustment and social reintegration of children associated with armed forces and armed groups: the state of the field and future directions*. A report prepared for Psychology Beyond Borders).

Women's coping strategies

There is a general consensus that numerous NGOs work with women on their specific, gendered needs in the Acholi sub-region. While many argue that

women remain the centre of attention to the exclusion of men in NGO work, and that this can have deleterious consequences for the deconstruction of masculinities and male disempowerment (Dolan, Chris. 2009. *Social Torture: The Case of Northern Uganda 1986-2006*. New York: Berghan Books), academic literature has highlighted a need for more work understanding the plight of women. This represents a possible disconnect between the work of NGOs and the work of academics. Additionally, as mentioned above, the literature on women tends to focus on the victimisation of women but little work highlights the strength and coping strategies of women. Informants discussed the need to shed light on this to contribute to positive representations of northern Ugandans in the international forum. Focusing on women's strengths also has potential to inform program and government policies to better serve the needs of women.

A forgotten group of men

A forgotten sub-section of foot soldiers, the young men who were not of high ranking, face issues of no or little education or employment, reintegration and reconciliation barriers, and are not the target of current NGO programs. There is fear that these young men, without other options, may re-enter armed forces.

Sexual violence against men

There is more recent work that looks at men as survivors of sexual violence. According to my sources, during the war civilian men were victims of sexual assault as a way to emasculate them. This has had deleterious consequences for household gender relations (SGBV, separation, etc.). While there is research into this area, currently by the Refugee Law Project, it is an under-researched topic.

This issue of *Voices* magazine involves discussions around reconciliation across regional zones in Uganda for those affected by the war. Preliminary discussions have shown that increased communication across regional zones can decrease stereotypes held about how the war affected different peoples, and show that there were, in fact, similar experiences held by communities across Uganda. While the importance of this cannot be underestimated, this did not come up in my discussions with stakeholders. One reason for this is that most of the groups I spoke with are focused on communities residing in Acholiland, and therefore their work is location-specific. Future investigations could take a macro examination of cross-regional reconciliation to further efforts towards holistic peace.

These topics are by no means exhaustive, and no doubt there are individuals working in such areas. However, according to those I interviewed, there is not enough focus on these areas. In an area that has dozens of researchers coming and going, it is important as researchers to refocus our attention to the needs of the community and conduct research that can have a positive impact for our participants. I would even go so far as to say it is our moral responsibility. □



Field Note

JRP documents the conflict experiences of Joseph Kony's birthplace - Odek

WATCH OUT for JRP's upcoming report on the experiences of the community of Odek, the birthplace of LRA leader Joseph Kony. 'The Forgotten Victims' chronicles the collective memories of violence, massacres, torture, abduction and displacement as told by community members, many of whom feel that their story has been mistold by outsiders and obscured by the shadow of Kony.

By telling their story in this report, the community is eager to change its image which has been consistently marred as being the home of perpetrators of conflict. They also want to actively involve themselves in transitional justice processes which they feel they have been previously side-lined from.

The Forgotten Victims, JRP's 21st Field Note will be out late 2014 and available on JRP's website.



It was only the gun speaking ...

The Ombaci massacre of 1981

THE MASSACRE AT OMBACI took place in 1981 during the war between the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) and rebel forces composed of former Uganda Army soldiers who went on to make up the Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF) and pockets of the West Nile Bank Front (WNBFB). Following the overthrow of Idi Amin in 1979 by the Liberation Forces (a combination of the TPDF of Tanzania and rebel groups from Uganda), the UNLA was left in control of the West Nile territory of Uganda.

The UNLA at the time was made up primarily of Acholi and Langi soldiers, and so people in West Nile thought that the ill-treatment they suffered at the hands of the UNLA was a form of revenge for the overthrow of Dr. Milton Obote and the injustices which Idi Amin meted out against the Acholi and Langi peoples. Accounts of the period note that both groups engaged in murder, rape, looting, destruction of property, and torture of civilians, among other violations. People feared to continue cultivating their land, attending to their businesses, or reporting for work in local health centres.

Many people chose to seek refuge in Catholic missions, mistakenly believing they would be safe in places of worship. During the course of this war, however, UNLA soldiers repeatedly targeted Catholic missions like Ediofe in Arua town and Lodonga and Ombaci missions, among others. At Lodonga, the mission found itself in the crossfire between the rebel forces and the UNLA soldiers in early June 1981. The attack on Lodonga foreshadowed what was to come at Ombaci later in the same month of June 1981. As the UNLA was gaining

strength against the rebels, they stepped up their campaigns against civilians which would lead to the attack on the thousands of innocent civilians taking shelter at Ombaci.

On the morning of the Ombaci massacre:

The rebels' attack reportedly began around 8:00am. It was not long before the UNLA soldiers reached Ombaci from Arua and began exchanging fire with the rebels. Respondents remembered that some of the rebels were "assembled under a mango tree behind the school, but ran away when government soldiers appeared." People ran to the mission when they saw the soldiers approaching.

Several respondents recalled a rebel called Abiriga who is credited with having shot several UNLA soldiers, who was possibly a commander of the operation. According to a survivor: "This man was terrible and he had very good speed and guns. He went and hid himself behind an anthill where he could see the government soldiers and shoot at them. This man shot very many government soldiers." As he was shooting "the bullets were entering through the school fence. And I was watching when the soldiers finally started chasing him. [...] A woman who was running to go to the mission was shot," another witness recounted.

The fight between the rebels and UNLA lasted one to two hours before the rebels retreated. According to a witness: "The rebels were using sticks and weak guns. The only big gun the guerrillas had was called anti-aircraft [and] the bullet would take 10 minutes to reach

the UNLA soldiers. After that fight when the government soldiers had defeated the rebels, the rebels ran into the mission and passed through to get out to another village.”

According to witness accounts, the UNLA soldiers entered the mission and school around 10:00am, once the rebel soldiers had retreated. They purportedly believed that rebels were hiding inside the mission and school, having chased some rebels over the fence surrounding the compounds.

A man who was inside the mission at the time recounted: “[They] said there must be rebels in the college and that they didn’t believe that only civilians were occupying the college ... As soon as they entered the college that is when they started killing people.”

As the soldiers flooded the school and mission, chaos ensued. Witnesses recall people locking themselves in the classrooms, dormitories, workshops, and church of the school. Through the windows they could see people being mowed down by gunfire as they tried to cross the school compound to escape or seek shelter. Soldiers came in from all sides and shot at random in the compound, then they went to the rooms where civilians were taking shelter and continued shooting and looting.

In the church, people were shot by bullets flying through the windows and by soldiers who entered from the front of the church and shot toward the altar, as well as by bullets coming from the back door of the church. Survivors estimated around 100-200 people took refuge in the church. When the firing died down, a woman remembered seeing “soldiers coming into the church in a different uniform and we realised they were government soldiers. They entered the church and moved around identifying people. They would identify five people, take them out of the church and as they turned their backs they would be shot and killed.”

The kitchen, being on the corner edge of the college, seems to have been one of the first places to be attacked. Survivors estimated there were about 30-40 people taking refuge there at the time. Various accounts recalled a heavy bomb falling on the kitchen and soldiers shooting survivors. As the kitchen was attacked, many people ran for shelter in other parts of the college, mistakenly believing they would be safer hiding elsewhere.

When the massacre broke out, people ran for cover in the classrooms and barred the doors when possible. Some rooms were left undisturbed, such as the chemistry classroom: “I stayed there while the soldiers were shooting and the soldiers didn’t come into the room. They never killed anybody inside our room,” recalls one survivor. One man who was hiding in a laboratory room recalled how the physics teacher saved the lives and property of those hiding by charging a battery for one of the soldiers.

Other rooms were not so lucky. Many people died from bullets coming through the windows as the soldiers were shooting at random in the compound. One woman lost her sister this way: “We were inside standing near the window when they shot my sister. My other sister

then told me we should go so we left that room.”

The looting continued for hours after the shooting stopped. In the garage of the school, people had taken shelter in the bay below which you would place a car for repairs.

In the workshop next to the garage, soldiers similarly spared people and looted possessions instead.

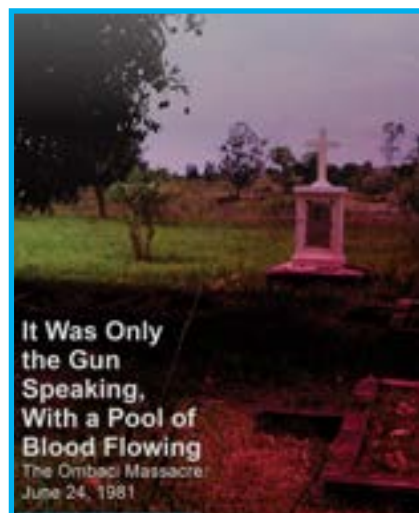
In the front building of the school, people were able to see the arrival of the soldiers very clearly. In this room, many people were shot through the windows as well as when the soldiers entered the room.

There were two dormitories in the college that are still there to this day. In the California dormitory, survivors recalled some soldiers shooting a number of people until another soldier, possibly a commander, stopped the shooting. When the soldiers arrived, many of these people were caught in the open while others fled for safety in the Italian’s quarters.

The mission compound also contained several buildings which served as garages and a carpentry workshop. Survivors from the carpentry workshop estimate that around 20 people were hiding there when the soldiers burst in. Several people survived when they were covered by the bodies of the dead. A man who was a young boy at the time recalled, “The soldiers came to the workshop and started shooting. My parents, two sisters, I and a brother had taken refuge in the workshop and they ended up being shot dead. I was young and the dead bodies fell on me and I was covered with blood.”

While most people tried to hide within the fenced off school and mission, some sought shelter in the brothers’ quarters just outside the fence of the mission.

In addition to taking refuge in the college, many people sheltered on the large grounds of the mission compound. Survivors recounted that the Red Cross organised a small field clinic on the grounds of the mission where they were treating people from around the community that were wounded in encounters with the rebels or UNLA soldiers. When UNLA soldiers attacked the regional referral hospital in Arua, Médecins Sans Frontières evacuated the wounded and staff to Ombaci where they joined the Red Cross operation. One health worker’s account recalled that this field clinic treated anyone that was wounded, whether civilian, rebel or UNLA. □



It Was Only The Gun That Speaks, While A Pool of Blood Flows is the Justice and Reconciliation Project’s 20th Field Note. It provides a detailed account of what took place during the Ombaci Massacre and the lasting effect it has had on its survivors based on interviews and focus group discussions with survivors and relatives of the victims.

Read this Field Note and other JRP publications at www.justiceandreconciliation.com.

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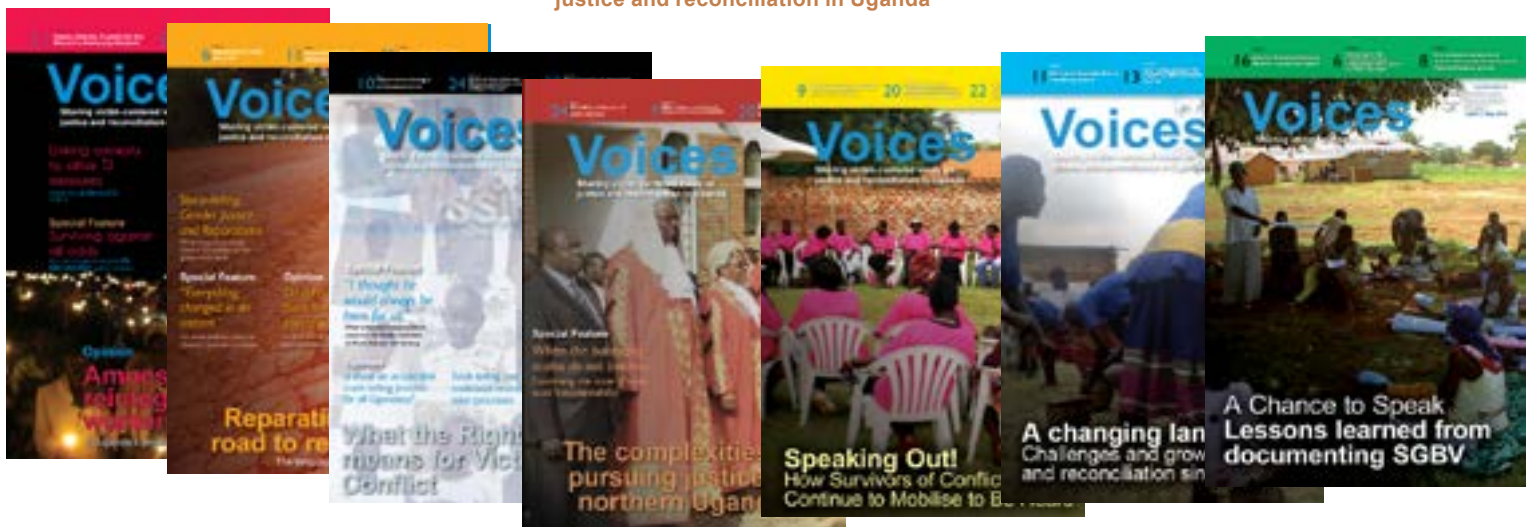
The Justice and Reconciliation Project's website is an excellent resource for researchers, students, transitional justice practitioners and anyone interested in peace-building and post-conflict developments in Uganda and around the world. All of our latest reports, publications and field notes are available for public access.

Remember to **subscribe to our monthly newsletter** for updates on our work, initiatives and views on transitional justice in northern Uganda. Also, like us on Facebook and follow us on twitter **@JRP_Uganda** and YouTube **JRP Uganda!**

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Voices

Sharing victim-centered views on justice and reconciliation in Uganda



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