May 2006

Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Internally Displaced Women and Girls in Liberia and Uganda and the Role of the International Community

Cassandra Veney

Follow this and additional works at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws

Part of the Women's Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Internally Displaced Women and Girls in Liberia and Uganda and the Role of the International Community

By Cassandra Veney[1]

Abstract

This article provides a brief background on the civil war in Liberia and the ongoing political violence in Uganda that have left thousands of people internally displaced, especially woman and girls. It analyzes the willing and unwilling roles of women and girls in both conflicts as combatants, wives, and rape survivors, etc.. It discusses how women's bodies became an extension of the battlefield as all participants in the conflict perpetrated gross human rights violations against women and girls in the forms of rapes, gang rapes, torture, and beatings. These violations have forced many women and girls, especially in Liberia to seek safety outside their home areas while others fled to camps for the internally displaced. The conflict in Uganda is contained within specific districts in the northern part of the country where the government has established camps. The camps often do not serve as a sanctuary as women and girls face many problems due to overcrowding, gender-based violence, lack of medical facilities, and little economic opportunities. A discussion of the internationalization of the conflict is included for fuller understanding of factors that produced or exacerbated internal displacement. In Liberia, the roles of the Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS) military group (ECOMIL), along with the support provided by neighboring countries to different insurgent groups are examined. The internationalization of the conflict in Uganda is analyzed by discussing the role of the governments of the United States and Sudan and their support of Sudanese People's Liberation Army and Lord's Resistance Army respectively. Lastly, the article focuses on the role of women in both countries' peace building efforts.

Keywords: Internally Displaced Women, Liberia, Uganda

Introduction

Liberia and Uganda have experienced civil wars and political violence that left their economies, political structures, and social institutions in disarray. As both countries attempt to rebuild their societies, Liberia is faced with the daunting problems of reintegrating not only large numbers of refugees, but also large numbers of internally displaced persons, along with ex-combatants—many are children. (approximately 70 percent or 38,000). The article has four goals. First, it provides a background of the factors that produced the violence. Second, it discusses women's roles and how their bodies became a part of the battleground. Third, the article examines the role of the international community and discusses its effects on internally displaced women. Fourth, it discusses the role women played and continue to play in building peace.

---

[1] Cassandra R. Veney is an assistant professor in the Departments of Women's Studies and African and African American Studies at Pennsylvania State University. Her primary research focuses on forced migration in Eastern Africa, human rights in Africa, and Africa-US policy.

Background to the Conflicts

When the National Patriotic Front of Liberation (NPFL), led by Charles Taylor, reentered the Liberia from Cote d'Ivoire in December 1989, it ignited a civil war that brought out various cleavages in society that previous regimes were able to suppress. Civilians were displaced due to fighting between the government and diverse insurgent groups that left hundreds of thousands of people displaced; women and girls were subjected to rape and sexual abuse; women signed up as combatants on all sides, and others tried to survive in displacement camps, their home areas, or other locations inside and outside the country. The internationalization of the conflict in terms of peacekeepers from the Economic Community of West African States' Monitoring Group (ECOMIL), the extension of the conflict into Sierra Leone, the participation of government and insurgent groups in Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Burkina Faso that sided with various Liberian factions and Charles Taylor produced tragic consequences for women and girls as the result of gender-based physical and sexual violence.[2]

The current internally displaced problems in Uganda need to be situated within the country's ethnic and regional cleavages. Added to this are regional factors involving the Sudanese government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). When efforts to enter into a peace agreement with the government and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) failed in 1994, it became obvious that the group and its leaders lacked coherent and ideological objectives (Akhavan 2005). With military assistance from the Sudanese government, the LRA turned against the civilian population in the north, mainly the Acholi, and began to abduct and recruit children to fill its ranks and for women and girls to serve as "wives" for domestic and sexual purposes (International Crisis Group 2004). The LRA began a reign of terror that abused people's human rights that led their displacement. Particular abuses were perpetrated against women and girls because of their sex and gender—rape and abduction that forced them to become "wives" and sex slaves.

Contested Spaces, Contested Bodies

African women affected by political violence are often portrayed in the media as victims. The media emphasizes their "victimhood" by showing them on the run carrying their possessions on their heads and babies bundled on their backs. In many of the world's conflicts including Africa's, women are both willing and unwilling participants while at the same time they are the survivors of some of the worst human rights violations. Conflicts and the nature of conflicts have difference consequences for women. The work of the Women in Conflict Zones Network supports this argument. Cockburn writes,

> the word *women* in relation to *conflict* perhaps prompts a picture of passivity, of those injured, abused, and displaced. But what has emerged from our research and networking is not victimology of women (2004:24).

---

[2] For a more detailed background on the civil war in Liberia see Adekeye Adabajo, *Liberia's Civil War* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Reinner Publishers, 2002); Yekutiel Gershoni, "War with End and an End to a War: The Prolonged Wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone," *African Studies Review* 40, 3 (December 1997):55-76; Eghosa Osaghae, "The Ethnic and Class Character of Political Conflicts in Liberia," In *Ethnic Conflicts in Africa*, ed. Okwudiba Nnola (Dakar, Senegal: CODESRIA Book Series, 1998):131-158.

Because of the nature of the conflicts, women played varying roles.

In Liberia and Uganda, the civil war was not "traditional" in the sense that the government fought one main insurgent group and the civilian populations supported one side or the other and therefore were assured of some semblance of protection. Moreover, O'Neil (2004:1) argues that,

> in the 1990s … wars were fought to control power and resources in a single state and were not usually between states; civilians, not armed combatants, became the intentional target of violence.

Whether it was the transitional governments or the government of Charles Taylor, civilians in Liberia contended with violence between "peacekeepers" and insurgent groups, the government and rebel groups, and intra-insurgent fighting. Uganda did not have as many insurgent groups as Liberia and intra-insurgent fighting did not last long, however, when the Acholi withdrew their support from the LRA, it unleashed a level of violence against civilians that was unprecedented and often women and girls bore the brunt of it. Finally, the conflicts were more convoluted due to how they were internationalized—the extension of the Liberian civil war into Sierra Leone, along with the involvement of Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, and Libya, and the activities of ECOMIL. In the case of Uganda, the relationship between the Sudanese government and the LRA, and assistance provided to the SPLA by the Ugandan and United States' governments precluded the Ugandan government and the LRA from agreeing to peace. Instead, the conflict was prolonged that pitted civilians against both the government and the LRA. The end result was the deaths of thousands of civilians and thousands more became internally displaced. The failure of the Ugandan government and the LRA to reach a peace agreement has forced people to reside in internal displacement camps. These camps have become targets for the abductions of women and girls by the LRA. The duration of the civil war in Liberia had a similar effect.

Giles and Hyndman assert that,

> throughout much of the world, war is increasingly waged on the bodies of unarmed civilians. Where it was once the purview of male soldiers who fought enemy forces on battlefields quite separate from people's homes, contemporary conflict blurs such distinctions, rendering civilian women, men, and children its main casualties (2004:3).

Given these new realities, women and girls became willing and unwilling participants in these conflicts and these two categories are often indistinguishable. Women and girls became "wives" in Liberia and Uganda after they are abducted and others "willingly" became "wives" as a means to obtain food, clothing, and shelter and to avoid rapes. Some Acholi women became the wives of Ugandan government soldiers. They did not want to leave with the soldiers, but by becoming a wife, they stood a better chance of surviving. The LRA's war strategy of abducting girls has forced many families into internal displacement camps in an effort to protect them. According to the International Rescue Committee (2004), young girls are preferred "because they are more

easily intimidated and indoctrinated. Girls are given rebel commanders as 'wives' or sex slaves." Abducted girls may also become child soldiers against their will and they are used as spies. These wives and other women "are central characters in these civil wars" for several reasons (Ochieng 2002:1). First, as Giles and Hyndman argue in sites of violence "gender relations and identities are (re)produced by governments, militaries, militias, schools, sports, and the media" (2004:4). In both countries, women and girls' domestic and reproductive roles were reproduced and even reinforced in the absence of educational and economic opportunities due to the fighting. They were abducted in order to meet men's needs: to cook, clean, collect water and firewood, carry supplies, nurse the wounded, and provide sex. Carolyn Nordstrom (1999:67) concludes that women in Mozambique also became unwilling participates and she writes "many had been forced into concubinage and 'marriage' at a soldier's whim and into providing manual labor."

Some women became combatants for the government and insurgent groups because they feared being raped and killed and viewed taking up the gun as a means of protection. Still, other women "chose" to fight after they were raped. One Liberian fighter, named "Black Diamond" received considerable media attention as part of the Women's Artillery Commandos (WAC). She reported that, "she joined the rebel forces after being raped by the notoriously ill-disciplined and unpaid forces loyal to former President Charles Taylor." Another member of WAC stated that, "when I pull out my gun I get more respect while Black Diamond was quoted as stating "I am motherless, I am fatherless, so I don't care. God is my family now" (quoted from the British Broadcasting Corporation 2003). On the surface, they appeared to be willing participants, but in reality, they were not. They chose to engage in the conflict because they lacked other options. Girls who were abducted were obviously unwilling participants in the conflicts, along with women and girls who joined the government or insurgent troops as a means of survival. Whether these girls were willing or forced participants, their roles varied in the conflict. Some of them were abducted and then trained to fight; others were used to recruit additional girls while others were integrated into the Small Boys' Unit (SBU) for the purposes of cooking, washing clothes, and collecting water. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNDFW) (2006) reported that these girls often "played the dual roles of fighters and wives of soldiers and commanders for survival purposes."

There were many instances where women's willingness to participate in armed conflict was not coerced. They were in "agreement with the war objectives" (Nzomo 2002:9). This has been demonstrated previously in several African conflicts particularly in wars of liberation or independence. Women willingly served as combatants in the wars of liberation in Angola, Algeria, Mozambique, Eritrea, and South Africa. Alice Auma Lakwena, an Acholi who founded the Holy Spirit Mobile Force (HSMF) in northern Uganda is an example of a woman who willingly served as an insurgent. She is described as a,

> self-styled prophetess who claimed to be a spiritual medium with the power to perform miracles. She exhorted her soldiers to overthrow the newly established NRM government and told them that bathing in holy water would make bullets bounce off them and that the stones they threw would turn into grenades (Akhavan 2005:406).

Lakwena and her followers believed that the Acholi "were being punished for atrocities committed by Acholi soldiers fighting the NRA under Obote II and Lutwa" (Westbrook 2000). Lakwena "succeeded in persuading some UPDA commanders to provide her with soldiers and weapons and, after her first military successes, she tried to control the remnants of the UPDA fully by attacking those units that refused to subordinate themselves to her" (Doom and Vlassenroot 1999:15). Lakwena mobilized significant supporters and posed a serious threat to the NRA/M when her forces almost reached the capital, Kampala in 1987. Although no single woman with Lakwena's stature emerged during the Liberian civil wars, women were willing combatants (as many as 22,000) and they too were the perpetrators of gross human rights violations that in turn led thousands of women to become internally displaced (Amnesty International 2005).

While the mostly Acholi women were displaced due to fighting between the government and insurgent groups, mainly the LRA in the 1990s, women in Liberia were displaced due to fighting between rebel groups, between rebel groups and the government, and between rebel groups and ECOMIL troops. Nevertheless, the fighting in both countries resulted in different consequences for women. First, the physical effects on women were different as all parties involved in the fighting attempted to "turn their bodies into a battleground. They become objects, over which the various warring factions demonstrate their power and control through rape and torture" (Ochieng 2002:1). Several organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Women's Rights International, and Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange report the ways in which women's bodies became weapons—rape, gang rape (even while pregnant), being used as sex slaves, being forced into marriages, and being forced to engage in various forms of sexual activities including incest. All of these violent assaults on women can and did result in unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS, and a myriad of psychological and mental problems.

Rape and other forms of sexual violence were used in Liberia and Uganda for various reasons. First, because they were used as weapons of war, the intent was to conquer the opposition through women and when it was done with a weapon (guns, knives, etc.) or with objects (bottles, pieces of wood, etc.), it produced more pain, suffering, and humiliation. Second, it was intended to degrade, demoralize, intimidate, and humiliate not just the woman survivor, but also her entire community. Third, the community was further defeated and weakened if she became pregnant and bore a child of her enemy. This was more complicated when fighting was along ethnic lines. It was difficult enough for the rape survivor to be reunited with her husband and family and reintegrated into her community. It became more difficult for her if the father of the child was a member of the enemy ethnic group. Fourth, women were viewed as the backbone of societies and in order to win the war sexual violence served as a means to crush the enemy's backbone. If women were responsible for holding families and communities together during armed conflicts, they were less able to do this after being raped, gang raped, and sexually tortured and abused—the physical, mental, and psychological traumas were overwhelming. According to Ochieng (2004), women's bodies were contested in the Liberian and Ugandan context for what women represented in society and in the fighting—the inferior sex who spread rumors, could not obey instructions, and served as spies for the enemy. Women were tortured through various

acts of mutilation that included cutting of their lips, ears, and noses. Furthermore, the necessary medical and counseling resources were inadequate before the conflict began and during armed conflicts they were virtually non-existence (Ochieng 2002).

The camps for the internally displaced represented contested spaces for contested women's bodies. One of the main differences between Liberia and Uganda was thousands of people fled from rural villages and towns to the capital Monrovia (as many as 500,000) while the displaced in Uganda remained in the contested districts (Bruce 2004). Whether in Liberia or Uganda, people lived in overcrowded camps where food, medial care, sanitation, water, educational and employment opportunities were scarce or non-existent. This was compounded by their position as internally displaced as opposed to refugees who had crossed an international border and were entitled to international assistance and protection. The internally displaced were at the mercy of the state that was often responsible for their displacement and in the absence of a functioning state, they were left in the hands of insurgent groups who were responsible for a number of human rights violations. Food aid was inadequate resulting in high rates of malnutrition that led to additional health problems and hardships. Women who were pregnant, breastfeeding, or elderly were at particular risk. The World Food Program (WFP) provided food assistance to the internally displaced in Liberia while the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) provided non-food items, e.g., blankets, plastic sheeting, cooking sets, although its mandate is to assist refugees and not the internally displaced (UN Security Council 2005). A number of international non-governmental organizations assisted the internally displaced in both countries when the security situation allowed.

Because of their gender, women and girls who made it to camps for the internally displaced still faced many human rights violations. This was illustrated in the "protected villages" established by the government in northern Uganda. The government ordered people into the camps and then began to bomb the surrounding areas in an effort to force the remaining residents into the camps (Human Rights Watch 2002). Instead of these spaces protecting women and girls, their bodies continued to serve as battlegrounds as they were even easier prey for the LRA and the government soldiers. Camps in Liberia also did not serve as sanctuaries for women and girls—various armed groups continued to enter them, attack, kill, and rape (Integrated Regional Information Networks 2005). Domestic and gender-based violence tended to increase under these conditions and instead of the military and insurgent groups protecting women and girls, some of its members were guilty of committing rapes and other forms of sexual and physical violence. For example, women were strip-searched, locked up, tied up, and beaten.

Because of the lack of international assistance, people continued to farm in order to survive. The strategy in northern Uganda was to leave the camps during the day and return at night. This has been detrimental to the safety of women and girls who have been raped and beaten on their way to and from the farms and on their way to collect water for their crops. Their bodies were also attacked when they left the camps to collect firewood for cooking and water for cooking, washing, and bathing. The camps posed a danger for women and girls because the LRA could easily locate them abduct them from the camps. Some of the women and girls remained in Uganda while others were taken across the border into Sudan. To demonstrate how unsafe the camps were from attacks and abductions by the LRA, people engaged in "night commuting" that involved staying

in the camps during the day and traveling to sleep in urban areas at night—between 30-40,000 of the commuters were children (Integrated Regional Information Networks 2005). People sought security outside churches, factories, hospitals, schools, and other public buildings (Mooney 2004). Night commuting had different implications for women and girls. Women who were pregnant or caring for young children or other family members were forced to remain in the camps. Women and girls who were brave enough to walk the long distances without any light to guide them faced the threat of rape and physical abuse as the pattern of their movements became known to would-be attackers.

Whether women become internally displaced, cross an international border and become refugees, or remain in their home areas, they continue to be responsible for keeping the family and community intact. Women's workloads and family responsibilities increased while their access to resources including food, land, medical care, water, and employment opportunities decreased (United Nations 2005). In turn, the roles of male soldiers and insurgent remained constant as providers and protectors of women. Men in internally displaced situations whether they are in camps, urban areas or rural areas could not protect or provide. Instead, they became frustrated, depressed, and hopeless and often projected these feelings onto women in the forms of domestic and gender-based violence—both made worse by the propensity of men in these circumstances to abuse alcohol. The placement of people in internally displaced camps tended to serve as breeding grounds for dysfunction and pathology due to the "progressive destruction of traditional family and community customs and support structures" (Patrick 2005).

The Internationalization of Conflicts and Its Effect on Internally Displaced Women

The internationalization of the conflicts in both countries in terms of the support provided by neighboring countries had a devastating effect on women and girls who suffered human rights violations and often became internally displaced. In other words, according to Human Rights Watch,

> the flow of arms and combatants, including mercenaries, across porous borders paired with the willingness of regional governments to support insurgent groups against neighbors is a dangerous combination (2003).

The internationalization of the conflict, due to the security threat posed by Taylor, allowed it to drag on for three more years during which massive population displacement occurred as people tried to escape the human rights violations from all sides involved. Amnesty International reported in 2001, one year after the renewal in fighting, that human rights violations were rampant and they included: extrajudicial executions, torture and deaths in custody; rapes, and killings. All of these led civilians, including women and girls, to flee to the capital that was already overcrowded, other urban centers, internally displaced camps, the bush or across the border.

For the women and girls who reached displacement centers, they contended with overcrowded conditions, gender-based violence, and a lack of basic necessities (Human Rights Watch 2003a). Moreover, children, including girls continued to be abducted by government and rebel groups from camps for the internally displaced. Finally, the external support in the form of arms and ammunitions for either the government militias

or insurgent groups simply exacerbated the already poor position of women and girls in the country due to the destruction or deterioration of schools, health facilities, social institutions, and limited economic opportunities. On many levels, women and girls who were internally displaced were adversely affected by the conflicts. For example, women's health was undermined both physically and mentally by the conflicts. They often did not have access to birth control and other family planning services, prenatal and antenatal care, and the necessary drugs, supplies, and equipment needed for complicated pregnancies and childbirths. Without these important reproductive resources, the rates of maternal morbidity and mortality were high. With the high incidents of rape, teenage sex that led to pregnancies, and sex in exchange for food, shelter, and money, sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS increased. The plight of women and girls was similar in Uganda (Ochieng 2004).

Decisions made by ECOMIL or various outside governments to intervene in the war on the side of the government or insurgent groups were not made with the safety and well being of Liberians in mind let alone women and girls. Decisions were made based on their fear of Taylor becoming a hegemon in the region or governments did not want the conflict to spill over onto their territory. In addition, ECOMIL, a peacekeeping entity was transformed into a peace enforcer as Taylor advanced toward the capital and numerous peace agreements were broken. In order to contain Taylor's advancing troops and to restore order to the country, ECOMIL was forced to conduct military operations that resulted in women and girls being killed and injured, along with massive displacements. Clearly, the commanders knew that any military operations, especially in an urban area such as Monrovia would produce further death and destruction, especially after many civilians from the countryside had sought safety and sanctuary in the capital. Furthermore, according to Human Rights Watch, these "forces also violated international humanitarian law by conducting indiscriminate air strikes against civilians and civilian objects" (2003). This was a decision made by an international actor in the conflict that must have known the consequences of this policy on innocent civilians including women and girls. Unfortunately, ECOMIL peacekeepers especially those who were a part of the Nigerian contingent were accused of committing human rights violations against civilians (O'Neil 2004). Again, ECOMIL was an international, peacekeeping entity composed of military units from various West African countries under commanders. The commanders were responsible for ensuring that peace was restored, human rights were not violated, and international law was upheld. Instead, some of its military policies left civilians injured, dead, and internally displaced.

The Nigerian government, through its role in ECOMIL, knowingly and willingly supported insurgent groups that allowed them to survive and flourish from the sale of resources, especially diamonds, under their control. The insurgent groups sold these resources to American, Japanese, and European companies and were therefore able to purchase arms and ammunition that allowed them to continue the conflict. The companies must have been aware of the origins of the commodities they purchased, the civil war occurring in Liberia, and their role in the conflict—the killing, injuring, and displacement of civilians including women and girls.

The internationalization of the conflict in northern Uganda did not involve as many state actors who were either afraid of Museveni's potential to achieve regional power or they feared his support of rebel groups who threatened to overthrow them as

was evident in Liberia. The main state actor in the region was Sudan and the main outside non-state actor was the SPLA. The other important state actor addressed from outside the region is the United States. The Sudanese government's support of the LRA allowed the rebels to set up camps in southern Sudan—from these camps they were able to cross back into northern Uganda, launch attacks against civilians in villages and displacement centers, abduct mainly children to fight for them or girls to serve as wives or sex slaves, and to loot and burn homes (Rone 1998). Rone states that,

> without the active support of Sudan, it would be much more difficult for the LRA to continue its abusive campaign. Sudan not only grants sanctuary to the LRA; it actively supports and collaborates with the LRA by providing them with weapons and food, basing military detachments near LRA camps, working with the LRA in military maneuvers, and even returning escaped captives to LRA camps (1998).

Because the Sudanese government armed the LRA, people were not safe in their homes or in the protected villages from abductions. The fear of abductions by the LRA produced the phenomenon of "night commuters"—a temporary, daily form of displacement.

Moreover, much-needed humanitarian relief that the internally displaced women and girls so desperately needed was affected by the Sudanese government's support of the LRA. Because the LRA was supplied with weapons and arms, the rebels were in a better position to intimidate relief workers, loot relief supplies, and plant landmines to disrupt or halt the delivery of assistance (Rone 1998). The situation of civilians beginning in 1996 was made worse because they became almost entirely dependent on food aid after they willingly went to camps or were forced by the government. The LRA, with its new supplies of weapons, food, fuel, ammunition, and communications equipment from the Sudanese government, knew exactly where to find the people and relief.

In 2002, one year after the terrorist attacks in the United States, the Sudanese government, in an effort to distance itself from its pariah status and under pressure from the U.S. government, allowed the UPDF to conduct cross-border raids into southern. The military campaign, Operation Iron Fist, was designed to flush out LRA rebels, destroy their bases, and return captured children and adults (Global IDP 2003). The effects on internally displaced women were harsh. The LRA simply returned to northern Uganda and continued to terrorize, abduct, kill, and loot and burn villages and displacement camps that were intended to protect them. For example, in Gulu district, forty thousand people were displaced from thirteen camps (Global IDP 2003). According to the International Rescue Committee (2004), fighting in northern Uganda has "escalated significantly since June 2002 and renewed LRA attacks within northern Uganda have been at their most brutal and destructive in the history of the conflict." Reddy states that, "the number of LRA attacks and child abductions has actually increased since the launch of Operation Iron Fist" (2002). To make matters worse, the LRA attacked and killed Sudanese civilians who were already suffering at the hands of government troops or insurgent groups, before fleeing back to northern Uganda. In an attempt to halt the LRA's military efforts and to force the conflict onto the international agenda, the Ugandan government in 2003 referred the issue of LRA's war crimes to the International

Criminal Court (ICC). The Sudanese government, again under pressure from the U.S government, agreed in 2004 to end its support of the LRA, but its policy decision to cooperate with Operation Iron Fist had already exacerbated the violence in both northern Uganda and southern Sudan that killed and injured many women and girls (Akhavan 2005).

Decisions by the Sudanese government to initially arm and assist the LRA were made with its security and sovereignty as the main priorities—national interests. The government wanted to destabilize the SPLA in the south and to dislodge it from northern Uganda. The Sudanese government's national interests did not include innocent Sudanese women and girls let along Ugandan citizens. Following the September 1, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, the Sudanese government wanted to cooperate with the United State's war on terrorism. Therefore, it cooperated with Operation Iron Fist. In Sum, the Sudanese and United States' governments were a part of the internationalization of the conflict in northern Uganda that failed to bring peace to the region, but instead resulted in the deaths, abductions, and injuries of many women and children.

The relations between the US government and President Museveni need to be addressed, along with the two governments' positions on dealing with terrorist organizations or governments that purportedly promote terrorism. Following the 2001 terrorist attacks, the United States' government classified the LRA as a terrorist organization because it received support from the Sudanese government. The U.S. government's policy on the conflict in northern Uganda was not to negotiate with the LRA (read: terrorists) and instead to pursue a military solution. In 2000, following Uganda's invasion into the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 1998, the United States S suspended military assistance.

However, following the 2001 terrorist attacks, Uganda cooperated with the U.S. government's war on terrorism and promoted a military solution to solve the conflict in northern Uganda (Wakabi 2003). In 2004, the U.S. gave Uganda $4.9 million in military assistance and it is argued that,

> this assistance bolsters the Ugandan government's reliance upon a military strategy to defeat the LRA, and potentially empowers the government's lack of faith in the peace process (Global IDP 2005).

The U.S. government's push for a military solution to end the violence was manifested in its insistence that the Sudanese government allow the Ugandan military on its territory as a part of Operation Iron Fist and its continued military assistance to the Ugandan government played a role in prolonging the conflict. As a result, innocent men, women, boys, and girls have been killed, tortured, abducted, and maimed. Women and girls have been affected by the conflict because many have been forced to become "wives" for the purposes of sex, bearing children, cooking, cleaning, carrying supplies, and other labor activities.

Women in Peace Efforts

As scholars point out, women are involved in all aspects of conflicts and have utilized various strategies to create and implement lasting peace (Cockburn 2004; Giles and Hyndman 2004; Nzomo 2002). This was demonstrated in Uganda and Liberia. As

early as 1989, women in northern Uganda began to voice their opposition to the fighting and through the Gulu District Women's Development Committee they dared to publicly make their position known. Women have used their positions on the Local Councils to expose human rights violations by the LRA and army forces. Women's peace building efforts have included international appeals following the abduction of school girls by the LRA in 1996; using social institutions and practices to counsel survivors of rape and abuse and ex-combatants in an effort to reconcile, reintegrate, and regenerate (Oywa 2005)

Through her government position, Betty Bigombe has worked tirelessly toward peace building in northern Uganda. According to O'Kadameri,

> Bigombe developed a reputation as a grassroots mobiliser, determined to make her mark in the area in spite of the cultural prejudice she endured in her first years as Minister (a woman trying to end a war between men) (2005).

Nevertheless, Bigombe initiated talks between the LRA and the government in 1993. She, and her delegation that included women, met with Joseph Kony in 1994 guarded by LRA security while the NRA refused permission for two male NRA army officers to meet unprotected. She was unable to broker a lasting peace agreement. Instead, as stated above, the insurgency gained new momentum following the failure of the negotiations. In 2004, she served as the Ugandan government's principal mediator in negotiations with the LRA (International Crisis Group). She met with LRA commanders and even agreed to meet with Kony in southern Sudan in an effort to broker a lasting ceasefire agreement. Bigombe is clearly between "the devil and the deep blue sea" as she is an Acholi who represents the government and yet she needs to craft an agreement that will convince the LRA fighters that it is worth giving up their weapons, positions, and the power. Otherwise, they will continue to fight. On the other hand, it is the Acholi people, women and girls, who have suffered unimaginable human rights abuses and the question must be asked is it fair to them if the agreement allows the LRA to walk away with impunity? To make matters worse, she is engaging in peace negotiations while the LRA continues to abduct, loot, and kill. In total, 20,000 children have been abducted and many girls are included in this number. She is in an inevitable position.

Other women in Uganda such as Rosalba Oywe, who was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 2005, have been in the forefront of peace efforts in Gulu and Kitgum districts through the establishment of People's Voice for Peace. Women in this organization used the local radio stations to appeal to religious leaders, ex-combatants, and children who were abducted for peace.

Because the conflict in Liberia virtually affected the entire country, women from all over the country were involved and women formed several organizations and participated widely in peace building efforts as the conflict appeared to have no end in sight. As early as January 1990, women participated in efforts to oust Doe by participating in rallies, marches, and demonstrations and after he is murdered, women worked toward reconciliation, but this was just the beginning of the conflict as new insurgent groups were formed and splits occurred in existing ones. Nonetheless, the Liberian Women's Initiative that sparked the women's movement for peace was founded in 1994—women were now more unified and were able to build coalitions across class,

ethnic, religious, and regional divides. Whereas, in Uganda, the conflict was viewed as a northern Acholi problem that had to be solved by the Acholis, i.e., the appointment of Bigombe who is an Acholi. Liberians women attended uninvited the ECOMIL peace meeting in 1994 because they realized that no lasting peace could be obtained without them due to the varied roles women played in the conflict. Subsequently, in 1995, they held meetings with the faction leaders to discuss peace building. Following the fierce fighting in Monrovia in 1996, Ruth Perry became head of the new transitional government and a brief period of peace was achieved. However, following the establishment of LURD in 1999, the Mano River Union Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) was established in 2000.

Between 2001 and 2003 it was apparent that women in Liberia wanted an end to the fighting and they also wanted the international community's involvement and assistance. Therefore, they stepped up their peace building activities and formed new organizations to meet their goals. They either as individuals or through their organizations engaged in a number of activities and strategies that included: marching on the UN and US embassy offices in Monrovia; demanding that rebel groups and government forces end the fighting; participating in anti-war, marches, rallies, and protests to end the violence.

Women in both countries worked at the grassroots levels to involve various segments of their societies including the combatants and ex-combatants. This was important because in both situations many of the fighters were children and a significant portion was women and girls who would need various types of counseling to be fully reintegrated into their societies. In addition, women in both countries realized the importance of involving the elderly, religious and community leaders, and the international community that included Diaspora members to bring attention to their plight. Finally, as the Africa Women and Peace Support Group (2004) pointed out both Liberian and Ugandan women were encouraged in their peace building efforts by their interactions and dialogues with each other. By finding out what the other was doing, the women were motivated to continue their push for peace.

Conclusion

Women and girls in Liberia and Uganda became internally displaced as the result of similar factors: cleavages and divisions in society whether they were rooted in colonialism, regionalism, ethnicity, or class—were not solved through the political process. Those in power fought to keep it and those on the outside chose to take up arms in an effort to gain state power and the resources that accompany it. Both conflicts were internationalized and this exacerbated the plight of internally displaced women and girls because the violence involved external actors who were not necessarily interested in ending the conflicts. Therefore, the conflicts and their effects on women and girls must be analyzed with the context of geopolitics in West Africa and the Horn of Africa and the United States' war on terrorism. The additional actors helped to supply the government and insurgent forces with assistance that allowed them to chose the military solution and not work toward peace building. As the violence in Liberia dragged on and the fighting in Uganda continues, women and girls suffer dire consequences either as willing or unwilling participants. In both situations, the bodies of the willing and unwilling women and girls became a part of the battleground. Women in both countries realized that for a

taste of freedom they would have to keep moving toward building peace. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf became Africa's first democratically elected president and the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of not just Liberian women, but women throughout Africa, rest on her shoulders to restore and maintain peace.

References

Adebajo, Adekeye. Liberia's Civil War. Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner Publishers, 2002.

African Women and Peace Support Group. Liberian Women Peacemakers. Trenton, NJ and Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, Inc., 2004.

Akhavan, Payam. "The Lord's Resistance Army Case: Uganda's Submission of the First State Referral to the International Criminal Court." The American Journal of International Law 99 (2005):403-421.

Amnesty International. "Liberia Report 2005." Liberia – Amnesty International <http://web.amnesty.org/report2005/lbr-summary-eng>. Accessed July 6, 2005.

Brett, E.A. "Neutralising the Use of Force in Uganda: The Role of the Military in Politics." The Journal of Modern African Studies 33, 1 (March 1995):129-152.

British Broadcasting Corporation. "Liberia's women killers." August 26, 2003 <http://news.bloc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/318529.stm>. Accessed April 20, 2006.

Bruce, Beverlee. "Liberia: The Challenges of Post-Conflict Reconstruction." Migration Information Source. September 1, 2004 <http://www.migrationinformation/org/Feature/display.cfm>. Accessed May 16, 2005.

Cockburn, Cynthia. "The Continuum of Violence: A Gender Perspective on War and Peace. Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict. Eds. Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004.24-44.

Doom, Ruddy and Koen Vlassenroot. "Kony's Message: A New Koine? The Lord's Resistance Army in Northern Uganda." African Affairs 98.390 (January 1999):5-36.

Dukuly, Abdullah. "A Return to Life for Liberia's Women Fighters." Mail & Guardian, 2 Mar. 2004 <http://www.womenwagingpeace.net/content/articles/0391a.html>. Accessed August 23 2005.

Gershoni, Yekutiel. "War without End and an End to a War: The Prolonged Wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone." African Studies Review 40. 3 (December 1997):55-76.

Giles, Wenona and Jennifer Hyndman. "Introduction." Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones. Eds. Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman. Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 2004.3-23.

Global IDP Project. "How can the US support the peace process? (July 2005)." Global IDP<http://www.db.idproject.org/Sites/IdpProjectDb/idpSurvey.nsf/wViewCountries/43BC01>. Accessed August 26, 2005.

_____. "Northern Uganda remains one of the world's worst displacement crisis – UN official." IDP News Alert Global IDP October 28, 2004 <http://www/idpproject.org/weekly_news/2004/weekly_news_oct04_2.htm>. Accessed July 6, 2005.

_____. "Offensive by the National Army exacerbates abductions and atrocities (March 2002-January 2003)." Global

IDP<http://www.db.idpproject.org/Sites/IdProjectDb/idpSurvery.nsf/w/ViewCountries/9CD67F>. Accessed August 20, 2005.

Human Rights Watch. "Liberia: Greater Protection Required for Civilians Still at Risk: A Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper." September 9, 2003a <http://hrw.org/press/2003/09/liberia090903bp.htm>. Accessed June 25, 2005.

_____. "Liberia: No Immunity for Taylor Peacekeeping Troops Must Protect Civilians." July 3, 2003b. <http://hrw.org/press/2003/07/liberia07303.htm>. Accessed July 6, 2005.

_____. "Uganda: Army and Rebels Step Up Attacks on Civilians." Human Rights Watch October 29, 2002. <http://hrw.org/press/2002/10/uganda1029.htm>. Accessed July 6, 2005.

Integrated Regional Information Networks. "Liberia: Focus on displaced persons." 2005. <http://www.irinnews.org/webspecials/idp/rLiberia.asp>. Accessed August 1, 2005.

International Crisis Group. "Peace in Northern Uganda: Decisive Weeks Ahead." International Crisis Group, Africa Briefing 22, 21 Feb. 2005 <http://www.crisisgroup.org>. Accessed August 28, 2005.

_____. "Uganda: Northern Rebels Undermining IDP Coping Mechanisms-UN." All Africa.com June 30, 2005. <http://allafrica.com/stories/200506300775.html>. Accessed July 6, 2005.

_____. "Northern Uganda: Understanding and Solving the Conflict." International Crisis Group (ICG) – Conflict prevention and resolution, Africa Report 77 14 April 2004, <http://www.icg/org/home/index.cfm?id=2588&1=1>. Accessed August 27, 2005.

International Rescue Committee. "The IRC in Uganda." June 7, 2004. The International Rescue Committee <www.theirc.org/Uganda/index.cfm>. Accessed July 6 2005.

Mooney, Erin. "Prioritizing Protection and Assistance for Africa's Internally Displaced Women and Children." Ethiopian Community Development Council, 26 May 2004. The Brookings Institution, <http://www.brookings.edu/fp/projects/idp20042605mooney.htm>. Accessed July 6, 2005.

Nordstrom, Carolyn. "Girls and War Zones: Troubling Questions." In Engendering Forced Migration: Theory and Practice, Ed. Doreen Indra. New York: Berhgahn Books, 1999:63-82

Nzomo, Maria. "Gender, Governance and Conflicts in Africa." Dakar, Senegal, 2002.

O'Kadameri, Billie. "LRA/Government negotiations 1994-94." Accord. Initiatives to end the violence in northern Uganda <http://www.c-r./org/accord/uganda/accord/11/lra.shtml>. Accessed July 6, 2005.

O'Neil, William G. A New Challenge for Peacekeepers: The Internally Displaced." The Brookings Institution-Johns Hopkins SAIS Project on Internal Displacement, April 2004.

Ochieng, Ruth Ojiambo. "The Consequences of Armed Conflicts to Women's Health: The Case of Africa." Forum Barcelona 2004.

_____. "The Scars on Their Minds…and Their Bodies The Battle Gronud: Women's Roles in Post Conflict Reconstrctuion." International Peace Research Association Conference, Suwon City, Korea, 2002.

Osaghae, Eghosa. "The Ethnic and Class Character of Political Conflicts in Liberia." Ethnic Conflicts in Africa. Ed., Okwudiba Nnoli. Dakar, Senegal: CODESRIA Book Series, 1998.131-158.

Oywa, Rosaliba. "Women's contribution to peacebuilding in northern Uganda." Accord: Initiatives to end the Violence in northern Uganda <www.c-r.org/accord/Uganda/accord11/women.shtml>. Accessed August 30, 2005.

Patrick, Erin. "Surrounded: Women and Girls in Northern Uganda." Migration Information Source, 1 June 2005 http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?id=310 <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm>. Accessed July 6, 2005.

Reddy, Shravanti. "Uganda: Operation Iron Fist likely to increase violence against women." Digital Freedom Network: Human Rights and cyber-rights news 5 December 2002<http://www.hrea.org/lists.women-rights.markup/msg001.html>. Accessed August 25, 2005.

Rone, Jerome. "Crisis in Sudan and Northern Uganda." Northern Uganda and Sudan's Support For the Lord's Resistance Army. Testimony Before the House Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights and the Subcommittee on Africa, July 29, 1998. Human Rights Watch <http://www/hrw.org/campaigns/sudan98/testim/house-07.htm>. Accessed August 24, 2005.

United Nations Development Fund for Women. "Liberia: Country Page." June 30, 2005, <http://www.womenwarpeace.org/liberia/liberia.htm>. Accessed April 20, 2006.

United Nations Security Council. "Seventh progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia." June 16, 2005.

Wakabi, Wairagala. "US Resumes 'Modest' Military Aid to Uganda." The East African 3 Nov. 2003 <http://www/nationaudio.com/News/East African/0311203/Regional/Regional43.html>. Accessed August 26, 2005.

Westbrook, David. "The Torment of Northern Uganda: A Legacy of Missed Opportunities." OJPCR: The Online Journal of Peace and Conflict Resolution 3.2 (June 2000)<http://www.trininstitute.org/ojpcr/p3)2westbrook.htm>. Accessed August 16, 2005.