



'Peace begins at home': Geographic imaginaries of violence and peacebuilding in northern Uganda

Nicole Laliberté*

University of Toronto Mississauga, Department of Geography, 3359 Mississauga Road, Mississauga, ON L5L 1C6, Canada



ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 23 March 2016

Keywords:

Peacebuilding
Feminist geopolitics
Post-conflict
Development
Uganda

ABSTRACT

While there is an acknowledgment of the importance of geographic and historical context in contemporary feminist scholarship on the relationship between domestic violence and warfare, there remains an assumption that mainstream narratives will tend to separate these forms of violence or, if connections are acknowledged, warfare will be given primacy. Based on ethnographic research in northern Uganda, I demonstrate how the presence of Orientalist narratives of violence in peacebuilding programs disrupts these assumptions by not only drawing connections between domestic violence and warfare but prioritizing domestic violence. I argue that these narratives of violence, and their associated geographic imaginaries, contribute to uneven geographies of intervention – geographies in which racialized bodies and intimate spaces are associated with war and thereby seen as appropriate sites for peacebuilding. By engaging with peacebuilding programs as sites of geopolitical negotiations in which variously scaled actors are vying for position in the post-war landscape, I argue that the tendency for peacebuilding programs to focus on a singular site of intervention – 'the Acholi home' – says less about the centrality of this site to the creation of peace than it does about the centrality of this site in maintaining the networks of mutual legitimization amongst peacebuilding partners.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Peacebuilding programs became increasingly prevalent in northern Uganda following the 2006 signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Government of Uganda. The agreement, however tenuous it appeared at the time, marked the end of over twenty years of armed conflict in northern Uganda. The preponderance of peacebuilding programs during this period simultaneously denoted and facilitated the transition from humanitarian to development programming in the region. The focus on peacebuilding allowed for an acknowledgment of the unique challenges facing a war-affected population while still promoting normative claims of economic development as the way forward (Government of Uganda, 2007; International Alert, 2008). The goal, in this down-scaled version of the liberal peace, was to stabilize the region enough to ensure its integration into national and international political and economic systems. Yet of the various approaches to building peace and creating stability that post-war interventions could have taken, many chose the same focus: to fight interpersonal violence in domestic spaces and community settings.

This focus on the home as a site of peacebuilding is counter to trends identified by feminist scholars in other contexts in which

mainstream narratives, if they do acknowledge of the connection between domestic violence and war, tend to give war primacy (Cuomo, 2013; Enloe, 2000; Pain, 2015). Historically, peacebuilding programs have drawn upon a simplistic 'war story' in order to determine their site of intervention, a gendered story in which women on the home front are separate from the conflict between men on the battlefield (Cooke, 1996). On the surface, the shift to domestic spaces in the peacebuilding programs in northern Uganda is in line with calls by feminist scholars and activists to make explicit the connections between domestic violence and war (Cockburn, 2004; Enloe, 1989; Sjoberg, 2006). However, unlike Pain's (2015) call for an intimacy-geopolitics in which domestic violence and military warfare are understood as connected yet neither is privileged, peacebuilding programs in northern Uganda produced the home as the primary site of post-war interventions.

In this paper, I argue that the skewed focus on domestic spaces in northern Uganda is actually in line with the Orientalist narratives of war perpetuated by the variously scaled geopolitical actors involved in designing, funding, and implementing of peacebuilding programs. I shall show how a core assumption of the peacebuilding programs – that there is a violent masculinity amongst the war-affected population that needs to be addressed at its source, the home – is a continuation of racialized narratives of the war. To build this argument, I engage with peacebuilding programs as sites of geopolitical negotiations in which multiple actors are vying for position

* University of Toronto Mississauga, Department of Geography, 3359 Mississauga Road, Mississauga, ON L5L 1C6, Canada. Tel.: +1 647 894 4333; Fax: +1 905 828 5273. E-mail address: nicole.laliberte@utoronto.ca.

in the post-war landscape. I argue their ability to agree upon a site of intervention – in the case of northern Uganda this is the rural home of the prominent ethnic group, the Acholi – says less about the centrality of this site to the creation of peace than it does about the centrality of this site in maintaining the networks of mutual legitimization between peacebuilding partners. As I shall demonstrate, professional peacebuilders – variously scaled as national, international, and local – all deployed racialized, gendered, and classed narratives of violence to inform the development of peacebuilding programs and secure their influence in the region. These multiple narratives perpetuated different geographic imaginaries of where violence was located – from ‘Africa’ to ‘the North’ to ‘the village’. It is my assertion that the rural Acholi home became the primary site of peacebuilding interventions because it emerged as the common site of violence within these imaginaries.

The narratives of violence upon which these interventions are based are reminiscent of what Narayan (1997) refers to as the ‘death by culture’ Orientalist narrative in which racialized women are in need of saving from the mortal threat posed by their primitive cultures. By examining the practices of Sati and dowry-murders in India and domestic violence in the United States, Narayan (1997) makes evident that siting violence in the homes and communities of racialized others is thus not a new project. However, analyzing this project as it is adopted and adapted by variously scaled actors in post-war geopolitical negotiations allows for insights into how development-style programming undermines the possibilities of an intimacy-geopolitics as envisioned by Pain (2015). In the case of northern Uganda, I argue that peacebuilding programs perpetuated Orientalist mindsets that contributed to uneven geographies of intervention – geographies in which racialized bodies and spaces are associated with war and thereby seen as appropriate sites for peacebuilding.

It is important to note, before moving forward, that I am neither dismissing nor downplaying the importance of community arbitration processes to address interpersonal conflicts and peacebuilding initiatives that contribute to the complicated reintegration of kidnapped children who returned to their homes after having been forced to fight for the LRA (Baines, 2007, 2011). I am also not denying the psychological trauma experienced by members of the war-affected population that often found its expression in acts of violence (Derluyn, Broekaert, Schuyten, & De Temmerman, 2004; World Health Organization 2005) and particularly in acts of domestic violence (Annan & Brier, 2010; El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005; Koenig, Lutalo, Zhao, & Nalugoda, 2003). However, rather than parallel the logic of peacebuilding programs in the region by performing a comprehensive study of the connection between domestic violence and years of militarized conflict (for examples of such analysis, see Annan & Brier, 2010; El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005), my contribution is to shift the focus to the peacebuilding programs themselves to understand how they deploy Orientalist narratives to construct domestic and community violence as the appropriate site of intervention.

This paper is based upon ethnographic research conducted in northern Uganda over thirteen months between July 2010 and January 2012. Participant-observation was conducted with three NGOs in the city of Gulu, the administrative hub of northern Uganda. The three NGOs selected were staffed and directed by people identifying as part of the Acholi ethnic group, the ethnic group most directly affected by the war. While they received funding and support from national and international agencies, they maintained a sense of themselves as local organizations working to support the needs of their communities. In addition to this participant observation, I used snowball sampling to identify and interview twenty individuals working at other community organizations, NGOs, and international agencies in Gulu. These interviews included a mix of national and foreign peacebuilding professionals. Due to significant

turnover and reassignment within the workforce, these twenty people had collective experience at approximately thirty-five different organizations and spoke about current and previous employment experiences during their interviews. I also interviewed five government and military personnel working in northern Uganda to understand how they understood their roles in peacebuilding. Finally, the data in this article include policy papers and reports from national, international, and local actors within the institutions of post-war peacebuilding.

It is important to note that I also spent a significant amount of time working with a community-based organization (CBO) in a rural area approximately three hours from Gulu city. Unlike the professional NGOs located in Gulu city that designed programs for vulnerable communities, this CBO was based on the volunteer labor of community members who sought to fight violence in their own communities – including their own homes. While their approaches to building peace are not the focus of this paper as they were effectively marginalized from the development-style peacebuilding programs, my experience working with them shapes my critique of the mainstream peacebuilding narratives. In particular, the willingness of members of the CBO to address their own – individual and collective – role in fostering violence stood in stark contrast to the lack of accountability on the part of mainstream peacebuilding designers and implementers.

In this paper, I use these lessons to explore how the idea of violence as geographically separate from the location of peacebuilders was promulgated. First, however, I offer a brief history of northern Uganda as a means of contextualizing the peacebuilding programs in question. I then turn to theories of violence and the politics of peacebuilding to demonstrate how geographic imaginaries of sites of violence in peacebuilding programs can contribute to perpetuating violent social relations at multiple scales. This theoretical frame is then used to examine the gendering of peacebuilding and the racialized geographic imaginaries of violence perpetuated by variously scaled actors – from national to international to local.

Northern Uganda as site of violence

During the colonial period (~1896–1962), the British Empire implemented a divide and rule colonial policy in the region that would become Uganda. The British constructed discursive and material divisions between the Bantu-speaking groups in the south, such as the Buganda, and the Luo-speaking groups in the north, such as the Acholi. The British colonists created a racial hierarchy out of this distinction in which the southerners ranked higher due to, among other things, the hierarchical political structures in the south that were reminiscent of British structures and provided a foundation for colonial administration (Atkinson, 1994; Branch, 2011). Accordingly, the British considered the Bantu-speaking southerners more ‘civilized’ than their northern neighbors who, in contrast, were characterized by the British as a martial race, inherently violent and aggressive (Atkinson, 1994). This racialization legitimized the location of political and economic power in the south and led to the decline of northern economies. Without a functional economy, the northern population became labor reserves for southern projects, with large proportions of male northerners recruited as migrant laborers for southern agricultural projects as well as foot soldiers for the police and army (Atkinson, 1994). The prevalence of Acholi men in the police and army was popularly interpreted by the colonial administration and in other parts of the country as the manifestation of the innate warrior identity of the male Acholi population (Doom & Vlassenroot, 1999).

This colonial narrative of regional divisions continued into the post-colonial period following independence in 1962. This includes power struggles between the leader of Buganda in the south and President Milton Obote, who was from Apac in the north. Obote

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1061843>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1061843>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)