Success Stories to re-cast Gulu Uganda: Confronting Narratives of Dependency and Inability through Ethnographic Collaboration in a post-conflict region

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ABSTRACT

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Thomas Prince

After the end of civil war in Northern Uganda, Gulu District and Gulu municipality are no longer sites of war, displacement or human misery. This acknowledgement is over-due for delivery to, and necessary for, the residents of Northern Uganda and the global community alike, in order to understand the successes and on-going recovery in this post-conflict region. Unfortunately many media sound-bites, NGO reports and academic studies remain focused and tied to the earlier decades of war between the rebel group, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Ugandan armed forces. Their attention to war and suffering in Northern Uganda is not unique, but rather a symptom of a much larger approach and positioning of Africa as marginal, unable, and in need of salvation. To counter the negative stereotypes of African violence and inability, Gulu provides a case study for post-conflict recovery, where creative and inclusive alternatives to large scale development and international solutions for Africa are based within the community and utilize local solutions and populations instead of external frames of reference and priorities. The stories of a small savings and loan associations and a locally-based NGO that are achieving a great deal of success in Gulu and help people re-build their lives after the war contrast and challenge global opinions and attitudes that Africa is unable to solve its own problems.

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Introduction

For the past five years I have been travelling to Gulu, Uganda for work, pleasure and/or research at each and every opportunity. On my longest trip to date, conducting six months of ethnographic field research in 2013 so as to write my Master's thesis in Anthropology, many events and activities outside of the formal research and data collection strengthened my connections to the region. My own involvement in varied community development practices, and the theoretical discussions examined in this thesis, have framed and influence my analysis and how I situate myself within this writing. In July 2013 I married my wife Adong Vicky, who is Ugandan, according to the traditional practices and norms for an *Acholi Introduction* ceremony. In October 2013, a small development project which I helped to start some years earlier, Beads of Awareness, took an important step forward with the formal registration of Beads of Awareness Uganda as a community-based organization (CBO) in Gulu. Also as part of my field research I did an internship with a small Ugandan NGO and our joint projects and activities will continue into the future. And finally the eight months I spent in Gulu helped me to greatly improve my Luo, the most widely spoken language in this part of Northern Uganda, which has allowed me to better integrate and has changed my sense of belonging.

Through the course of this research, as I have expanded my own networks and knowledge of voluntary and grass roots organizations, and the diverse framings and practices of development in Gulu, I have entered into new relationships and communities that go beyond the scope and implication of a typical Master's-level, research project. My ethnographic intention for this thesis is to share from some of the voices and knowledge that have generously contributed to the research project beyond my own self-reflections and analysis, or to write an auto-ethnography, though the orientation, the philosophy and all of the weaknesses and errors found within are my own.

The differences in wealth and income-levels between my lived experiences in the Canadian urban centres of Montreal and Calgary, from those in Gulu Town and Koro sub-county in Northern Uganda are extreme. These differences are regular topics for conversation with Ugandans and foreigners alike, and in both countries there are few simple answers or explanations to be found. It is easy in some ways to understand how many people who live in Gulu can imagine western countries like

Canada as wealthy and peaceful utopias, given that their exposure to foreigners is often limited to international workers from large budget development agencies like USAID or the Norwegian Refugee Council. Staff from the large NGOs, or missionaries who have the financial support of churches abroad to spend many months in the region, are highly visible. Against such a backdrop the divides between student researchers or unpaid volunteers from the ex-pat development experts, missionaries and other foreign elites seem to breakdown or are often unacknowledged, as westerners collectively are assigned positions of wealth and prestige because of their global mobility and the strength of their foreign currencies relative to the income levels and costs of living in Gulu. Similarly in Canada, where news of Africa often comes through mainstream media accounts focus on violence or natural disasters, accompanied by charitable appeals for assistance and funding, also share internalized message of affluence in the West and poverty in Africa. Even the NGO or other aid appeals that speak of longer term relief or development projects, such as access to clean water or medicine rarely include the voices of Africans, or rarer still acknowledge that poverty does not define the continent.

However comparisons of abstract and complex concepts of living standard and quality of life according to economic measures and stereotypes alone conceal as much as they reveal. And, given the challenges of dependency and marginalization that have been imposed on Africans and fed to non-African audiences through highly problematic simplifications and assumptions, there is a need to examine and speak against the narrative that Africa must be saved, or that this salvation must come from outside the continent. Expectations that development and foreign aid for Africa will result in a "catching-up" with the West has led to global disappointment by many in scholarly and applied fields, for donors and perhaps most significantly for the residents of Gulu District. The reasons aid and development have failed to achieve the expectations and aspirations heaped upon them by donors and recipient communities alike have been examined for many years. This thesis touches on some of these debates, and seeks to consider the perspective and position of the actors situated within "the community" in Gulu, instead of those who stand outside it, whether by choice, geographic location or knowledge systems and world views. Instead of following the paths of comparisons of living standards or quantitative markers and measures for developments success and failures, I instead consider how alternative development practices can emerge in unexpected places, and how these practices may be considered in other ways, outside or beyond the western economic tropes and traditions of modernity and development.

In my field research and in this thesis I have struggled to look beyond the economic measures

and the historical baggage that divides an affluent and powerful Europe and North America from an impoverished and dependent Africa. This approach is based on my own experiences in Gulu, my personal philosophical beliefs, and the anthropological writings and theories, that situate and challenge the importance of economic measures and of quantitative, statistical data. Gulu has taught me a lot, and radically changed some parts of my personality and how I choose to engage with the world. I continue to struggle to understand the world views different from my own commonly found amongst my Acholi friends, though the religious orientation which is extremely strong in the north of Uganda has lead me to return to church and has renewed my Christian faith after decades when I lacked any interest or religious spirit. Instead of embracing Western-influenced, secular, economic models and measures as representing or defining a universal truth, I find such metrics are of limited use to investigate and understand how Africa can, and is, moving beyond a dependency on western resources and creating innovative and inclusive solutions to address the problems on the continent. There is no universal truth presented by my approach and research methodology, instead what I have collected and presented here is very much a situated knowledge. Though much of the data and arguments are collected from a micro-level ethnographic perspective, the information, and analysis, speak to larger debates that connect to other areas of the African continent beyond Gulu District in Northern Uganda.

My field research, and the structure and analysis in this thesis, centre around two key research sites and informant groups in Koro sub-county of Gulu District in northern Uganda. One is a small savings and loan group based on the outskirts of Gulu municipality, Kica Ber. The second is a small Christian NGO, Sports Outreach Ministry which is even further from Gulu's urban centre. Employing ethnographic methods such as participant-observation, interviews and other techniques such as video recording and digital photography, my thesis and other products of this research that remained with int the field, such as a small website, short video clips and a small book, endeavour to tell a story that stands as a counter-discourse to Africa as a site of problems and misery. In both research sites the stories collected and shared here highlight how community and empowerment are not abstract concepts, but rather practices employed in order to reach a shared destination of achievement and improvement. It is by following their lead that success becomes the cornerstone of the research and thesis, and their successes are celebrated for the power they have to lead by example and transform the sites where they are based.

My research collaborators' voices which are included here, (and in the few documents that have been prepared for them and their communities to share the research and recognize the shared ownership

of the material), may in some ways disagree with some of my arguments or parts of the analysis presented here. This is an ever present risk in Anthropology and has brought decades of insecurity, scepticism and critical re-evaluation of ethnography, Anthropology and modern research methods and methodologies. I am greatly indebted to my many professors and my Master's cohort at Concordia University for the rich and valuable discussions on such topics and themes before I entered the field. Without prior recognition of the uncertainties and ambiguities in field research amongst people of different cultural backgrounds and life experiences, and later writing about them, I doubt I would have been able to complete this research. My search for pathways, to share my research in Gulu and to engage in discussions, is a process I hope will continue for many years to come with my collaborators and other stakeholders in what is quickly becoming in many ways my own home community, and is what has oriented my focus during my the research and writing.

My own place in Gulu and involvement

I regularly experience my own pain, suffering and anxiety when encountering poverty and injustice in Uganda that both frustrate and motivate me, often bringing further anxiety and introspective reflection. Why should I feel pain or suffer when I see someone else who is working hard to improve their own life, or who has, perhaps, known hunger, trauma or tragic personal loss because of my own values and expectations? It is this uncomfortable position of the witness that I have worked to confront and challenge in this thesis. The stories shared within are stories of groups and individuals who have endured, survived and achieved success in many ways. For those who say "but there is still suffering, injustice and poverty in Northern Uganda" they are absolutely correct. But rather than exoticize or fetishize it, which has been done for too long, this thesis presents some of the stories of overcoming and working to correct the ailments in the area. These stories present an alternate view of history and the present situation in this part of Africa and an alternate approach to development that is led and owned by the community. Development, like emergency relief and humanitarian aid, has too long been framed as possessions and gifts from the wealthy and powerful. However these can also be indigenous creations. These alternative creations and their creators should not be drowned out by voices of the media or NGO campaigns who choose to focus on suffering and inability alone. There is value in bringing the world's attention to sites of injustice, however it is also important to recognize the valuable role being played by those who live within these sites, and under this injustice, to challenge it, resist it and hopefully to conquer it.

When I applied for graduate studies I never considered doing my field research anywhere other than Gulu. Since 2011 I have bounced between Gulu and Montreal, with never enough time in Gulu. Not surprisingly my wife has been the main reason for my bouncing to Gulu since 2011 and the desire for to spend more time there. My research focus on women's groups and their different collective practices of saving, farming and income generating activities grows out of a development partnership between a small number of Canadians and Ugandans called Beads of Awareness. Since 2010, a small group of Canadians and I have been working with groups of women and youth who make jewelry from recycled paper, which we sell in Canada and the profits are re-invested in different development projects in Uganda. I am also closely connected to a small international NGO, the Concordia Volunteer Abroad Program (CVAP), who works with students and small organizations in Canada and Uganda to encourage sustainable development partnerships and projects. Thus in a critical examination of the development engagements and representations of Gulu, and NGO narratives and practices, I am actively involved and implicated in my area of study, and in the communities and practices examined.

My connection to CVAP has brought many advantageous surprises, the largest being when I met Vicky in 2011 while we both worked for the organization. But two more recent surprises and connections helped me to conduct my research in Uganda. The first was in the winter of 2013 when a grant application by CVAP, Gulu University and Concordia University, with funding through CIDA and AUCC[1], which allowed two Ugandan graduate students to study for one semester at Concordia University, and take part in an internship with the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling. One of the students, Susan Ajok, who grew up in Gulu, and worked for several years during the conflict in humanitarian and relief projects, became a great friend in Montreal, and later my research assistant in Gulu.

The role Susan played in the research went well beyond assistance and can't be overstated. Beyond helping me to build rapport with the groups and translating from Luo to English (without which the research would not have been possible), she played an active role in reconstructing my research question, and developing the research methodology that helped to ground the research. As a graduate student herself, currently completing her Master's degree in Peace and Conflict studies at Gulu University, plus her own experiences growing up in Northern Uganda, her previous research experience

[1] The funding for these two students from Uganda was made available through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)'s Students for Development program in partnership with the Association of Universities and Colleges Canada (AUCC).

in community development, and her own participation in a savings and loan club, she was able to offer many invaluable insights and raise my attention to my own subjectivity and biases. Given the ethical risks and my own anxieties of conducting research in a post conflict context Susan's assistance as we revised the research design and met with the leaders of different savings clubs gave me a lot more confidence and also a valuable insider perspective to better understand the context and to find ways to make the research collaborative and inclusive. While waiting for ethics approval in Uganda, Susan gave early advice on some of the precautions necessary in conducting interviews or meeting with groups. "We don't want people to tell stories about when they were in the camps. During the war people learned to tell stories, especially to foreigners, about suffering and hardship. We don't want that. We want them to talk about the successes in their life. The successes connected to their groups." (Susan 01/06/2013)

The second surprise CVAP provided me occurred during my time in the field when a last minute opportunity to participate in a funded internship of my own through CIDA and AUCC while in Uganda. I was only aware of the opportunity because of my earlier work in the CVAP office, and the connections I built with the Concordia International office, as part of the team which first wrote the grant applications which brought Susan and another colleague from Uganda to Concordia for one semester. The CVAP office in Gulu was instrumental in organizing and coordinating my internship with one of their partner organizations, Sports Outreach Ministry (SOM). After completing my internship I have continued to work with the CVAP staff in Canada and Uganda towards achieving some of the goals and priorities shared by CVAP, SOM and myself that emerged during my internship and research.

My approach to this research and the ethnographic methods employed are shaped by my own interests and passion for applied anthropology, and a desire to make the research collaborative and inclusive. The ethnographic research methods used, of participant observation, interviews and focus groups collected a wealth of data which I hope will continue to be made accessible and useful in Gulu. This thesis is about success stories from Gulu. The words written here are my own, but the stories and the knowledge, the qualitative data, collected belong to Susan, the research participants, and to the people who live in Gulu District. These success stories are shared to recognize and celebrate the hard work and dedication of Ugandans, and, as possible, I have struggled to share their voices here. This work in some ways a response to, and a challenge of, narratives of negativity, of suffering, death, violence and poverty, that are not the only narratives from Gulu. As a foreigner how these are employed outside Gulu is personally troubling, but there is a much larger and pressing problem how such negativity can be internalized and is involved in perpetuating dependency and undermining self-

resilience and agency in Gulu. Images and histories of the past should not orient the hands of clocks in the present, nor dominate discussions in Gulu and outside it. Peace, recovery and reconciliation are being restored slowly, and need to be encouraged and recognized.

While I brought my own early research questions and curiosities to the field about the endurance of negative representations in Gulu, it was through discussion with Susan and the leaders of local organizations, like Kica Ber, that alterations were made to the research focus and methodology. Instead of my earlier interest to look at the power of foreign NGOs to frame and situate the post-conflict recovery, and how negative representations linked to the past were restricting identity and undermining local solutions, we decided instead to focus upon the power of small, local groups, like Kica Ber and Sports Outreach Ministry, to create their own alternative strategies for success. As this has been a collaborative research project, with a shared intention to make the data and knowledge contained within accessible, Susan and I have worked hard to find ways to share it, and to make it relevant. After collecting numerous individual interviews and photos with Kica Ber a small book, highlighting their success written in English and Luo, was given to the group that can be used as a tool to increase awareness of the group and its objectives amongst its own members and to other interested parties in the district. Noting the challenges of the language differences and the limited literacy levels among some members of Kica Ber and other groups, a small workshop was also designed where some of the research findings were presented, and questions were put to the groups about what success meant, how groups could help individuals and their communities achieve it, and what barriers impede it. From this workshop a short summary report was written in both English and Luo that was given to each of the groups who participated. In collaboration with CVAP and Sports Outreach Ministry, there are on-going discussions of how to use the knowledge, photos and videos collected during my internship to assist both these organizations and the communities with whom they work.

More recently, in August 2014, my own orientation in Gulu, and my critical attention to foreign NGOs has again shifted. I recently was hired by a small NGO registered in both Uganda and the USA, Grassroots Reconciliation Group (GRG), as the Program Director (Head of Mission). Given that GRG's mandate and focus is to work with former combatants of the LRA who have returned from “the bush”, the attention I had in writing this thesis of moving beyond the past is being re-interpreted in my work and interactions. I am extremely happy that GRG's approach is to build upon the success of groups, who are composed of former combatants and people who were displaced to the IDP camps in a holistic approach that encourages reconciliation in rural areas that were the most effected, and where the impacts

of the conflict can still be felt. As with Kica Ber and SOM there are many success stories to be found in the groups that GRG works with, however the tensions and challenges of research and work in a post-conflict setting are now being directly confronted in my new job, where among other livelihood activities, psycho-social counselling to address the traumas of the war, stigma against former combatants and especially women who, abducted as young girls to be "wives" for the LRA commanders, have returned with children born in "the bush". During my field research in 2013 it was easy, and in many ways a coping mechanism as a foreign researcher, to decide to leave the past in the past, but today the need to acknowledge that stories of success in the present can not silence the more painful ones of the past has become a more visible reality to manage and engage.

Chapter One - Writing Africa today

Africa is the second largest continent in terms of land area, and home to the second largest in continental population on Earth. With more than 50 countries, composed of radically different climates and cultures, it is hard to speak of the continent as a unified whole. It is home to some of the fastest growing economies over the past two decades, and has an abundance of natural resources. However the most popular trope since the 1970s and 1980s, when global audiences were informed about famine, conflict and death, particularly in Nigeria and Ethiopia, the need to save Africa has re-emerged (if it ever went away) as the "cause celebre" for nations, celebrities and organizations located outside the African continent (Somerville 2013). Such a trope fails to report much of Africa's diversity, potential and successes. Instead, according to all this media hype, the NGO appeals and the celebrity endorsements, successful solutions to Africa's many problems have failed to emerge.

Africa is too often presented as a concept more than a geographic location, or an assembly of diverse nations. This constructed concept is built upon simplistic and partial images and stories of poverty, war and inequality in international media headlines, international non-government organizations (NGOs) and international development agencies. This attention to Africa, and the rhetoric that it must be saved from itself by outsiders, keeps alive a long history that connects the Atlantic slave trade to decades of colonial rule by European nations running up to the present day. These images, narratives and histories distort and exclude many realities on the ground, and silence the voices and stories of Africans themselves, both the positive and negative.

Gulu District, located in Northern Uganda, is a particularly interesting research site to consider how stories and images African violence, suffering and inability can become entrenched and silence alternative stories of success, recovery and peace. Little more than ten years ago, at the start of the new millennium, Gulu was labelled "the worst humanitarian disaster of recent times" by the UN under-secretary general for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief, Jan Egeland (Agence France-Presse 2003). This quote was given during the last decade of a civil war in Northern Uganda that lasted over 20 years. More recently, in 2012 a large USA-based organization, Invisible Children, launched its *Kony 2012* campaign online, broadcasting to millions of online viewers a partial and problematic representation of the region using outdated footage and focused upon past violence, that ignored the recovery and peace process after the civil war (Invisible Children, Finnstromm 2012 , Branch 2012). Though Egeland and Invisible Children may have broadcast their messages and appeals for Gulu with

the best of intentions, unfortunately both largely failed to include local perspectives and understandings or local stories. A lot has changed in the past eleven years since Egeland made his comment: the civil war *has* ended, people *no longer* live dependent on humanitarian aid in displacement camps, and numerous local organizations and associations *are actively* involved in re-building communities and creating success stories of recovery and rehabilitation. Though there remain many challenges in Gulu after the war, the use of outdated images of war and dependency need to be abandoned, and more attention brought to the practices and stories of Gulu-based groups. There is much to learn from their new, inclusive and collaborative strategies, to build peace and pursue development, in order to resolve the challenges that remain within the Gulu community, and that speak to larger conversations about Africa's position globally and the continents future.

Africa is no more or less a place in need of salvation than any other. Instead it is a choice to circulate negative images of Africa for either mis-guided, selfish or altruistic motives, or a combination of the three, a choice often made with consideration of audiences outside Africa more than within. The foreign audiences that receive and consume these images, brought to them by the media and NGO aid appeals, are equally in need of salvation: salvation from their own stereotypes and ignorance. Including the voices of African change-makers and recognizing that no country or continent has a monopoly on war, on exploitation or dependency, nor on success, achievement and the ability to save others is a step towards overcoming inequality and recognizing the universal rights to opportunity and dignity that are shared amongst all peoples and all nations. As Pulitzer Fellow Gbemisola Olugobi has noted that Western media reporting has ignored the advances and accomplishments of African nations as they improve health and education standards and reduce poverty. The selective reporting dehumanizes Africans, and Olugobi quotes a 2005 African Presidential Roundtable, which examined some of the USA's most prestigious print media's coverage of the continent, that the American press is "at best, dismissive of the continent's progress and potential, and thus leading to continued "exotifications" and marginalization of the African continent. At worst, coverage disregards recent trends towards democratization, thus betraying an almost contemptuous lack of interest" (Olugobi 2005: 4).

To investigate alternatives against this type of negativity and inequality framing the representations and understandings of Africa by outsiders and insiders alike, whether NGOs, academics, the media or other stakeholders, this research examines the success stories of community-driven development and recovery from Koro sub-country in Northern Uganda. It is a step that recognizes that new pathways beyond imposed limitations need to be discovered and explored. In Koro, as in many

other parts of Northern Uganda, numerous groups and communities have begun to experiment and develop their own solutions to overcome the challenges that remain after the civil war. Rather than a continued reliance upon foreign relief, which thereby perpetuates dependency and a loss of agency to solve their own problems, these groups are building their own self-help and other communal strategies to re-build their communities. Their efforts and successes are presented and analyzed using postcolonial theory, and particularly the struggle for liberation found in the works of Frantz Fanon, and African authors, such as Achille Mbembe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o among others. These authors have written extensively to challenge European domination of Africa, Africans, and other (formerly) colonized peoples, and their imposed marginality in European theory and academic traditions. This approach to, and understanding of, liberation challenges Eurocentric theories of identity and practice through the methods of ethnographic study and discourse, in a search for alternative representations and alternate paths to development and recovery. By focusing upon success and the steps taken towards liberation by indigenous organizations I follow the practice of counter-discourse, to work against the negative projections heaped upon Africa. While Fanon, Mbembe and Thiong'o all employ liberation in different ways, and in different contexts (for Fanon liberation was part of a practice of political revolution and emancipation, whereas for Mbembe and Thiong'o their work in liberation is more situated in writing and academic knowledge systems), they all embrace a common rejection of European hierarchy as biased and poisoned by racism.

Liberation is an alternative path to development and achievement that contrasts radically with the dominant approach of liberalization found in much of the writings on development and NGOs. Liberation offers new opportunities to study and analyze some of the silences and gaps within this literature, especially with regard to Africa. Liberalization on the other hand is restricted to and encompassed within a limited Eurocentric and economic ordering of the world. Liberalization as I employ it here is closely connected to the ideology and effects of neo-liberal restructuring and a global landscape where complex and contested concepts of community, progress and development, as well as physical and biological entities such as human lives, the environment, clean water and food are reduced to economic measures, global statistics and pathways for intervention which reflect the inequalities of wealth and mobility not wisdom nor indigenous tradition. Instead of remaining within the liberal and market-centred considerations of development that are embraced by the World Bank and pro-development agencies, liberation is a practice to contest the continued inequality and inequity of capitalist structures. Many scholars who critique development and NGOs in Africa, within

Anthropology and the social sciences, have concentrated upon, and remained within, the political economy and liberalization, terrains which are dominated by larger forces from above. This approach has the risk of remaining entrenched within the racialized tropes of African negativity instead of recognizing the valuable potential of an alternative path of liberation using Fanon to discover and analyze African alternatives. Though the critiques of some of these scholars regarding power and global capitalism are important, they often have failed to recognize the creativity and agency available through micro-level ethnographic examination and analysis.

One of the many challenges to building such an alternative theoretical framework to examine Africa, development, and the agents involved, that works against hegemonic and dominant power structures and inequality is the challenge of scale. It is hard to discover liberation in the large organizations, or development policies and programs designed to correct and solve the problems of poverty across the African continent. Liberation, which contrasts and challenges liberalism, is rooted in the orientation, the practices and decision making of development actors located at the grass roots. These small locally directed organizations and community associations rely on their creativity and their location within, and amongst, the communities where they operate to develop development practices that empower and respond to local realities and context, instead of employing the imposed, foreign, capitalist solutions.

To offer a counter-discourse to African marginality, and liberal development, the alternative practices and world views need to be explored, discovered, and disseminated rather than dismissed or left unacknowledged. Given the past decades of development failure, it is no longer practical or valuable to continue embracing and pursuing neo-liberal or global market-place solutions to achieve a "catching-up" with the West, or to continue combating poverty through channels that maintain and preserve economic and political dependency. Liberation, instead, is a unified struggle for freedom, autonomy and dignity that is inclusive, and non-competitive in many ways. As one postcolonial writer from Africa, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, argues liberation is a move away from Europe and what has been written and imposed in the past, and instead "is towards the direction of Africanity as an assertion of African identity; Afrocentrism as a liberatory methodology; decolonial thought as a combative epistemology and pan-Africanism as a terrain of ongoing struggles for liberation" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013:44). Given the attention Africa has received from development agencies, NGOs, donors and the media, and the enormous sums of money involved, more attention to African alternatives for development and liberation are long overdue.

Anthropology and Africa- Engaging the Other

Anthropology, as a discipline that historically studied exotic people in far off locales, has a long relationship to Africa, though its roles and impacts on the continent are highly contested and for many problematic. Some scholars writing from Africa, such as Mafeje, are sceptical and suggest that Anthropology is defunct and useless, nothing more than a product of, and tool to perpetuate, western domination and hegemony (Mafeje 2001). Other African scholars such as Jean and John Comaroff (2013; 2010) or Achille Mbembe (2008; 2002) have also raised similar critical questions and sceptical concerns, of Anthropology and western academic approaches, but their attention and calls have not been for a rejection of Anthropology as a practice, but rather as broader questions of re-orientation, epistemology, Eurocentric modernity and liberalism.

Since the 1980s Anthropology has been confronted with difficult questions of representation and authority. Texts such as Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), Clifford and Marcus's *Writing Culture* (1986) among others opened doors to unsettling questions regarding the practices of how anthropologists, and others with privilege and power, study and write about the "Other". To whom do we write?, Whose words and world views are privileged? and How do we avoid constructing exotic and essentialist, out-of-time representations that mask the diversity and creativity of those peoples and places from where we study? are all important questions in the new directions and reflections within the discipline. In response to these and other questions the recognition of subjectivity and its close connections to power has become more important (Ortner 2005). Though the concept of subjectivity has gained increasing attention with anthropology, anthropologists are not the creators, nor the first to integrate the concept into our studies. Within European philosophy the concept has a long history, and since the mid-20th century it has been especially visible and important in the liberation writings of colonial, decolonial and postcolonial literature from the African continent and diaspora. Subjectivity has been employed differently by different authors, such as the different interpretations of Foucault's structuralism and Geertz's interpretive approach (Ortner 2005), but with regard to Africa's position and subjectivity Achille Mbembe is one of the most active and vocal writers in his consideration of temporal and historical contexts of African subjectivity. Mbembe includes the effects of the slave trade, colonialism and the continued marginalization of the continent to frame a particular subjectivity based on the interaction of African subjects with a world that has tended to define them in negative terms and as the binary opposite of European rationality and civilization (Mbembe 2008, 2004, 2002) that is unique and can not be easily understood or engaged through Eurocentric approaches and theory.

While there are many problems with the often presented construction of Africa as a unified whole (Ferguson 2006), with regard to Africa's subjectivity and alterity there is a commonality of historical experience and marginalization that transcends the heterogeneous reality of difference on the continent. This has led some authors, such as Ndlovu-Gasteni to employ African subjectivity as a unifying concept and experience (Ndlovu-Gasteni 2013). The histories of Africa's past, like that of other colonized Others, have been written as tools for social engineering to build a future where Africans transcend and abandon their traditions and beliefs in order to join the universalized, scientific, Eurocentric world (Spivak 1996: 281). Within the foundations of postcolonial scholarship there is an assertion that Africans, and other former colonized peoples and nations, must struggle to reclaim and recover their histories is closely connected to the agency they are permitted in building their futures (Fanon 2008, 2004; Ndlovu-Gasheni 2013;Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1993, 1988). Such postcolonial works and texts, like the genre of Third World Literature, provides a counter-discourse that speaks back to power inequalities, and are part of the struggle towards liberation (Gugelberger 1991). Despite contemporary changes of discourse and moves toward equal and universal rights, the status allowed to Africans continues to be a status of inferiority and ignorance (Mbembe 2008). Rather than ignoring or turning away from such inequalities it is important that these concepts be explored and employed to challenge this marginality and to seek pathways to navigate or transcend it as a move towards liberation. To combat the silence that preserves Africa's alterity it is necessary to engage with and create space for African voices and African alternatives, and to celebrate and include their "creativity of practice" (Mbembe 2004: 348) in building and analyzing theory, in both scholarly works and contexts, and in more applied, policy oriented research and policy formation at macro-, global levels, and at micro-, community and regional levels.

Gulu, Uganda is a particularly rich field site to engage African subjectivity, to re-consider development as a western practice and to examine global (mis)representations of Africa and its problems. Though today Gulu is a post-conflict zone, a place of recovery and rehabilitation, for more than two decades, from the mid-1980s until 2006-2008, it was a site of civil war and briefly towards the end of the war grabbed international attention. Though the war has ended in Gulu, many representations of the region have failed to keep pace. Images of irrational violence, abducted child soldiers, and a community dependent upon outsiders need to be recognized as images from the past, and replaced by more recent alternatives such as success stories that re-position Ugandan associations and organizations as leaders of change able to challenge their marginality. While anthropologists have incorporated

subjectivity and reflexivity in their writings, we are not the only ones who write and represent the "Other" in the current digital age. NGOs, activists and other development scholars and practitioners, as well as media outlets, need to be sensitive in their construction of representations, especially on the African continent. Using Gulu as a site of critique to investigate creativity and alternative practices following Fanon, Mbembe and other postcolonial African authors, it is necessary to re-consider how to engage with "the African Other", and to reflect on the importance of inclusion and understandings of subjectivity and marginality in the representations we create and consume.

From Gulu three ethnographic scenes are considered that challenge the silent marginality of African subjectivity through the self-help practices of savings and loan, the links between religion and development, and the collaborative efforts at community engagement during a two day work shop, to transcend power inequalities and western expertise.

This thesis is situated within and alongside postcolonial discourses that challenge the silent domination of Eurocentric ideologies and its global structures, by presenting alternative practices and voices engaged in creating alternative futures. Ethnographic investigation and writing provide a form to present and investigate such alternatives that need to be read and explored more widely outside the disciplines of anthropology and postcolonial studies. These alternative stories from Gulu speak most directly to the representations of war and suffering that linger after the conflict, but also speak to a wider debate about the fetish of violence in Africa by the West.

Fanon and constructing the Dark Continent

To guide and structure my argument and thesis I employ postcolonial theory, and particularly the writings of Frantz Fanon. Through Fanon, and other authors he influenced, it is possible to use liberation as a theory and practice that applies directly to the case of Gulu, to confront the construction of Africa as a homogenous entity characterized by violence, inability and disorder. Fanon recognized that liberation was something that could not be given, but rather had to be achieved through unified resistance of racialized power structures, hard work and self-help (Fanon 2008).

Fanon is well known amongst some communities of scholars, especially those writing from non-Western locations, but for those readers less familiar, it is important to situate him as a theorist and

author, and to bring some context to his work[2]. Fanon was born and raised on the island of Martinique, a French colony in the Caribbean. He was a student of Aimé Césaire who, like Fanon, challenged the marginalization of Africans and the diaspora of African descent. Fanon's first book, *Black Skin White Masks* was inspired by his experiences in France as part of the Free French Forces during the Second World War, and the racism he encountered there. He reflected in this text how, because of his education and social status in Martinique, he had considered himself French and looked to Europe as the source of knowledge, cultural and world view. However, this quickly changed in the face of European racism that makes him question and reconsider his identity as a Black man and colonial subject. Fanon, like other non-European writers of his generation, used his education and up-bringing to interrogate Eurocentric values and racial stereotypes, and to consider the effects of subjectivity and power that create an insecure and negative foundation for the racialized, colonial identity.

After the war Fanon studied Psychiatry in Lyons. After his graduate thesis entitled *"Essay on the Dis-alienation of the Black"* was rejected by the French academy, he decided to publish it outside the university under the title *Peau noir, masques blancs* (*Black Skin White Masks)*. This work has been influential for many writers who have followed Fanon's gaze wards the alienation and marginal identity for peoples living under colonial oppression (Bhabha 2008: xvi). He later worked in Algeria during the Algiers- French war, an experience which reinforced his disgust and rage towards colonial power inequalities and the naked violence of colonialism. Fanon ultimately joined the FLN (Front de Liberation National) in Algeria fighting against the French. It was during this time that his revolutionary and political ideology for Africa and other colonized states, took shape. *Les damnés de la terre* (*The Wretched of the Earth)*, which he wrote shortly before his death at the young age of 36 from leukaemia, does not mince words or leave any doubt as to Fanon's attitudes and objectives.

With *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon challenged the reader to consider questions of racial (in)equality and how larger structures, such as language and ideological connections to Europe influence the identity, power and position colonized peoples are afforded, and that such structures must be overcome. With his later work *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon's arguments shifted to a more radical call for changing the world, resisting inequality and Europe's influences to build a different future through struggle and achieve liberation. This text, and the ideas within have been embraced as a

[2] Fanon has also been widely read by many revolutionary and resistance movements around the world, including Steve Biko and the ANC in South Africa, the Black Panthers, Mumia Abu Jamal, and many others (Bhabha 2008: ix). More recently I was surprised and inspired when I found a Fanon referenced in a popular Uganda Newspaper, the Daily Monitor (29/05/2014).

foundational and defining text for third world movements and resistance (Bhabha 2004: xvi).

Today Fanon's writings are in some ways out-dated historically and theoretically, written during the independence movements in what are today former colonies, and before post-structuralism, feminism and world systems theories, among others, emerged to challenge the approaches within scholarship, and critically interrogate the concepts of voice, reflexivity and representation. However Fanon's quest for a decolonization of the mind and a complete decolonization of the world dedicated to a different future offer important commentary that can be applied to Gulu and other places in Africa. His call for violence as the only path to decolonization in *Wretched of the Earth* appears today out-dated in Gulu and other parts of Africa where violence fatigue has set in. The many years of violence and conflict have not broken the chains of inequality and division, nor brought dignity or liberation from exploitation. While his calls for violence do appear dated, and need to be read sceptically, his objective and vision remain relevant and urgent: for liberation; to improve and re-balance the world; to discover alternative ways to contest and overcome marginality, and to struggle for social justice and to reclaim the power and authority to construct an inclusive future (Fanon 2004). Beyond the political independence of colonized nations, Fanon's call is for a continued struggle against the colonial project of cultural alienation, that implanted ideologies that Europe and its values and ideas are what "would save them from darkness" (Fanon 2004: 149). Fanon argues that the struggle for liberation is gradual and will take generations (Fanon 2004: 145-146).

> We believe the conscious, organized struggle undertaken by a colonized people in order to restore national sovereignty constitutes the greatest cultural manifestation that exists. It is not solely the success of the struggle that consequently validates and energizes culture... The liberation struggle does not restore to national culture its former values and configurations... After the struggle is over, there is not only the demise of colonialism, but also the demise of the colonized. (Fanon 2004: 178).

Fanon's resistance against racial marginality is shared by one of Uganda's most celebrated writers, P'Bitek Okot. Using traditional literary forms drawn from Acholi oral poetry, his "songs" were an early critical voice against colonial oppression and modernization in East Africa that defended the value and beauty of traditional culture (P'Bitek Okot 1984). He shared Fanon's critical view of imposing European values, social structures and systems of governance that ignored African history, traditions and

practices. Many other early African writers, including Nigerians Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, joined Fanon and P'Bitek in raising critical voices against colonialism and used writing as a tool to call for independence and to challenge the power and authority of Europe. Later generations of authors, such as Edward Said (1978), Congolese author V Y Mudimbe (2010, 1988), and Achille Mbembe (2008, 2004, 2002) from Cameroon, have continued this tradition of writing against an imperialism of knowledge and subjectivity. Africa has produced many critical scholars and voices who have written to audiences within the African continent and outside it. While their works are increasingly widely read, there remain many questions about the position of Africa as "the Other" in academic studies, aid campaigns, news stories and on the internet, that are often unacknowledged or left unanswered.

Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o in his fiction, university lectures and essays, and in his decision to write in Gikuyu, a popular African language in Kenya, and to stop writing English, has fought against Eurocentric domination in academics and in African daily lives. His works *Moving the Centre* (1993) and *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986) both interrogate how to move beyond the power of negative representations created in Europe to shape identity, culture, and inequality in Africa. For Thiong'o, African resistance and liberation from colonial and neo-colonial oppression require more than economic and political change, social and cultural freedoms also need to be recovered and acknowledged. Looking at the connections and influences between language and culture, particularly in literature and education, Thiong'o argues that Europe taught Africa inferiority through text books and school curriculums, where only the European values are celebrated and African cultural richness is degraded as primitive and savage (1986:100). Thiong'o has spent much of his academic and literary career to recognize African and other traditions of literature and knowledge that don't originate in Europe.

Cameroonian anthropologist Achille Mbembe has in many ways carried forward the critical attention of Fanon and Thiong'o in his writings on Africa's marginality. The link between Fanon and Mbembe came into print in 2012 when the latter published an article in African Studies on the 50th anniversary of the publication of *Les damnés de la terre* (African Studies 71.1 April 2012). Mbembe's 2002 article in Public Culture *African Modes of Self Writing* (2002) is extremely critical of the limitations and hegemony imposed upon Africa by European history and knowledge restricts African subjectivity to victimhood (Mbembe 2002: 272). This article brought numerous responses and several prominent anthropologists and other scholars responded in Public Culture to Mbembe's arguments (Public Culture 16:3, 2002). Mbembe notes the challenge that Eurocentric philosophy and discourses

are inherently racist, and asks “how can life be redeemed, that is rescued from this incessant operation of the negative?” (Mbembe 2002: 259) In response he offers the imaginative social practice as ways to approach and re-conceptualize African concepts of society and the world that had earlier been excluded (Mbembe 2002: 246) Mbembe in a later article for Public Culture again calls for attention to the “creativity of practice” (Mbembe 2004: 348) within African communities that challenges the objectification, marginalization and isolation imposed by Eurocentrism, and challenges the exclusion of African knowledge and practice from Modern/Western/Eurocentric theory. Mbembe's larger work, On the Post Colony (first published in 2001) builds on his earlier articles and essays to critically examine Africa's global position, and the many diverse problems, from within and without, that have kept the continent mired in a conceptual sea of marginality and negativity.

Anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff have also written extensively about Europe and Africa's encounters, and the impacts of representation. Challenging the position of Africa as behind or struggling to catch Europe, they offer an alternative perspective to consider how the current changes in Europe and the modern world can be alternatively read and analyzed through African theories and knowledge systems in *Theory from the South* (2012). This latest work builds on the many years of scholarship by the Comaroff's on the constraints that still chain African identity, its global position and its representations to European values and world views.

Relegating Africa to the periphery and the silencing of African voices through the power of western stereotypes that perpetuate negative images and discourses does not occur only within the colonial past, the walls of academia or in large public institutions like schools. Popular media and digital content, as well as social movements and the relatively recently emerged NGO 'industries' of humanitarian relief and international development also contribute in the global era of replicating the inequality and cultural domination of Africa (De Waal 2008, 1997). As large international media corporations have been scaling back their foreign offices, NGOs have come to occupy a more important role in informing the media of international news (De Waal 2003; Bizimana 2002). But the news that is generated by foreign media and NGO collaborations does not circulate only outside of Africa, they are also picked up by African media and disseminated amongst African audiences their own biases and negative stereotypes (Styan 1999: 289).

Graham Harrison's study (2010) of the Make Poverty History (MPH) campaign in the UK demonstrates well the power of historical stereotypes being embraced in western campaigns for international solidarity and justice. His article is a compelling analysis of how the MPH agenda to

combat social injustice globally quickly was usurped and evolved to a new form that uniquely connected poverty to Africa. The role of the media, prominent politicians and celebrities who have made Africa "their cause" quickly changed the campaign from a fight for global justice and equality to a call for charity (Harrison 2010: 395), and defined Africa as poor, unable and a moral obligation for Western nations.

Mark Leopold is an anthropologist who has done extended research in the Northern regions of Uganda. In his writings he has consider the power of negative representations and the struggles to reclaim identity, especially within African contexts and amongst African audiences. Leopold demonstrates in his writings the power of identity and how European concepts such as ethnicity have been adopted and included in the continuation of inequality and intolerance in post-colonial Uganda between different geographic regions of the country and different ethnic tribes. Reporting on the civil war in Northern Uganda, television and print media in Kampala, Uganda's capital located in the Central region of the country, offered little more than negative stereotypes of Acholi, associating the conflict and the people to irrational violence rather than reporting facts of the conflict or calling for an means to end the hostilities (Leopold 1999). His later ethnography, based in the northwestern region of Arua, the birthplace of Idi Amin, explores this theme further, and notes the challenges to move beyond an internalized marginality amongst residents in the region (Leopold 2005). Leopold's later work gives insight on why it is so important that efforts be made to move away from the limited value placed on African knowledge and practices, as opposed to perpetuating imported, European stereotypes and negative definitions for the continent and its many diverse peoples.

One of the most sustained and powerful critiques within postcolonial theory that connects NGOs to imposed negative representations of Africa, often constructed by foreigners, is the continued exploitation of Africans according to the intentions and objectives of outsiders. Looking at how Gulu and other conflict zones in Africa are represented, Alexandra Schulteis (2008) identifies how child soldiers have become a commodity for humanitarian consumption.

> "What attracts immediate and superficial attention to Africa's child soldiers … is that the brutal existence of a child soldier dovetails neatly with depictions of Africa both as a place born of hell and misery and as a continent that, like a child, can be saved." (Schulties 2008:33).

Too many authors and NGOs use western concepts of childhood connected to innocence and the imperatives for outsiders to provide protection according to universal cultural values, and use an extremely limited script in how child soldiers are presented or debated. With regard to Invisible Children's first movie, *Rough Cut*, Schulteis problematizes the imagery and storyline presented of children in Gulu. "That aesthetic simultaneously transforms the circumstances of the Acholi "night commuters" into both enter- and infotainment" (Schulties 2008: 34). Schulteis' concern, that Invisible Children creates a problematic aesthetic in how it presents the reality of Gulu, closely connects to the arguments of other authors (Branch 2012; Finnstromm 2012; Nibbe 2010) and my own concerns about how the organization has represented the post conflict reality in Gulu by continuing to focus upon now outdated images of night commuters, and the suggestion that the war is not over in Northern Uganda. The aesthetic of child soldier as victim contrasts interestingly from earlier representations by the Ugandan president Yoweri Musevini. In its successful rebel campaign fought from the bush, the National Resistance Army (which later became the largest political party in the country the National Resistance Movement) celebrated how children took up arms and joined the fighting (Kayihura 2000). Schulteis' recognition of how child soldier become idealized, silent victims echoes Mbembe (Mbembe 2002: 245) and connects closely to other postcolonial writers including Kwame Anthony Appiah's work (2010, 1990) on how colonialism and the legacy of Eurocentric world views and representations objectify humans, robbing them of their humanity and freedom.

As a way forward, to overcome and contest the negativity of representation, and the coloniality of being and knowledge where Africans are exotic objects and "Others" to be defined and controlled by the West (Ndlovu-Ghatsheni 2013), it is valuable to instead look at local practices in Northern Uganda to navigate and transcend imposed limitations. The chapters that follow look at different practices in Koro sub-county which I situate as struggles towards liberation and to achieve success. This understanding of liberation builds upon the work of Fanon and other postcolonial writers, and connects to the aspirations of NGOs to construct new paradigms (Holmen 2010: 9). The indigenous organizations presented embrace practices that allow them to challenge and re-define their own subjectivity, rather than employ one imposed from the outside, and re-structure imported practices, knowledge and discourses that allow them to confront the common alterity of the African subject. But before moving on to those sections, it is first necessary to better understand the context of Koro sub-county and Gulu, Uganda.

History and today

A complete and exhaustive history of Uganda is not possible here. Many histories of Uganda have been written by both Europeans and Africans, which are available for interested readers to learn more[1]. While some postcolonial scholars may take exception at presenting such history of Uganda, and the decision to begin at independence from British colonial rule problematic, for readers who are new to Uganda's history and current situation, the following is cautiously offered.

Uganda gained its independence in 1962 from the United Kingdom, as independence movements spread across the African continent. In the years1960 to 1963, 24 African nations gained independence from France, Belgium and the UK. Unlike some of its neighbouring countries, such as Congo (Zaire) and Kenya, the transition to independence in Uganda was relatively peaceful. During the colonial period Uganda never attracted a large European settler population, but many "subjects" from other British colonies, especially the Indian sub-continent migrated or were relocated to grow the economy. The colonial borders which were inherited at independence brought together many different tribal kingdoms and language groups. Many of the present-day tensions and conflicts, often framed by ethnic and regional/geographic divisions have roots in the colonial administration and the policies for labour selection, education and the integration into the national economic structure according to tribe (Nhema and Zeleza 2008). The north of the country was used primarily for agricultural production, concentrated in food crops and cotton. The Niloltic speaking tribes of the north, such as the Acholi, the Langi and the Alur were heavily recruited into military service. Southern areas of the country were planted for export crops such as tea and coffee, and the Bantu speaking peoples, especially from the Buganda tribe, were recruited into the government ministries and civil service sectors. The Buganda, in the south and central regions of the country, were the largest tribe during colonization, and remain so today, and are also the most unified politically under their king, the Kabaka. The political organization and administration in Buganda was the most similar to European models, and this gave them a privileged colonial position, and influenced the naming of the colony and inherited at independence for the nation.

The relative peace and stability during the transition to independence did not last long in Uganda. Shortly after Prime Minister Milton Obote and his elected Uganda People's Congress Party (UPC)

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[1] Alan Moorehead's popular accounts of the early European exploration and colonization of the Nile river: The White Nile (2000) and The Blue Nile (2000). Among other academic texts Jean Pierre Chretien's 2006 *The Great Lakes of Africa: Two thousand year of history* is exhaustive in its consideration of the region's history. Other texts on Ugandan colonial and post colonial history include Nhema and Tiyambe Zeleza *The Roots of African Conflicts* (2008) and Karugire's *The Roots of instability in Uganda (1988).*

formed the first government a fall out occurred between the Kabaka, who held the Presidency, and the parliament controlled by Obote. Uganda's founding constitution was torn up, the Kabaka fled into exile, and the government was quickly restructured with Obote being appointed President. Obote's first years in power are remembered for corruption, and the use of violence to run the country (Nhema and Zeleza 2008). In 1971 the Obote government was ousted in a military coup lead by General Idi Amin. Amin's time in power is rightly called a terror, with hundreds of thousands of Ugandan citizens executed by the state, and the forced exodus of Ugandans of South Asian ancestry. In 1979 Tanzania invaded, provoked by Ugandan aggression along their shared border, defeated Amin's troops, and occupied Kampala while Amin fled into exile. Tanzania did not occupy the country for long, but instead worked towards a return to democracy. Obote returned from exile to regain the Presidency, and from 1980 to 1985 corruption and violence continued to undermine political progress until Obote was again ousted in a military coup lead by another northern General, Tito Okello. In 1986 Musevini and the National Resistance Army (NRA) came to power after a military defeat of their northern rivals and quickly brought in sweeping reforms to rebuild the country. But Musevini did not have the support of the entire country. Nearly all the earlier leaders (Obote, Amin, Okello) had come from the north, and up to 1986 the army had recruited mainly from the northern tribes. Musevini, of the Muyankole tribe from the Western region, coming to power through armed rebellion, was not trusted, and in the north there were fears of reprisals. During the many years of fighting between the NRA rebels and the Ugandan military forces extreme violence, war crimes and violations of human rights characterized the struggle for power. In the months after Musevini took power several rebel groups declared war and vowed to topple the Musevini government in the north and other parts of the country (Finnstromm 2008, Behrend 1999).

Amongst the Acholi in Gulu multiple rebel groups formed, many composed of former soldiers who had fled north after the NRA came to power. One particular rebel group, the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) combined the military techniques of former soldiers with religious ideology and belief in supernatural powers, led by a spirit medium named Alice Lakwena. Though the HSM's march on Kampala failed in disaster and the movement lost many troops in battles, its most lasting impact was to prepare the ground for a second rebel group named the Lord's Resistance Army, also lead by a religious medium Joseph Kony (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010, Finnstromm 2008, Behrend 1999).

Kony is a central, almost mythic, figure in many academic studies and popular media accounts of the conflict in northern Uganda during the past 15-20 years. Though today his rebel force seems to be little more than armed bandits who terrorize rural villages in the densely forested regions in Central

African Republic (CAR) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), from the late 1980s until 2008, Kony and the LRA were the face of evil and irrational violence in East Africa. The first warrants for war crimes and gross human rights violations issued by the International Criminal Court were for Kony and his top military commanders (Allen 2006), and an international task force has been hunting him since 2011. He was the "star" of one of the largest social media campaigns in history, Invisible Children's *Kony 2012*. As Sverker Finnstromm, a leading anthropologist on the LRA and the civil war in northern Uganda, explained to me over dinner in Gulu "Simply dropping Kony's name in a newspaper or academic article grabs attention" (25/10/2013). Through the course of Kony's 20 year war against the Musevini government, over 30, 000 children were abducted, hundreds of thousands of civilian were killed, and over one million people were displaced for several years to IDP (internally displaced peoples) camps at the behest of the government[3].

Branch (2009), Dolan (2009), Finnstromm (2008), and Allen (2006) are some of scholars who have looked most closely at the conflict, and peeled back the layers of ignorance and misinformation about the war between the LRA and the UPDF (the Ugandan People's Defence Force) in their studies. As international humanitarian relief poured into the region during the first decade of 2000, these authors and others brought critical attention to the complexities, implications and complicity of the international community, the government and the rebels in the prolonged violence and suffering in the Northern region during the war. Life in IDP camps, even with support from international donors and UN programs, was deplorable. The mortality rates for mothers and children were above 1 000 deaths / week, and treatable illnesses such as typhoid, cholera and malaria killed large numbers because of crowded living conditions, poor sanitation and other complex factors (Dolan 2009). Branch, Dolan and Finnstromm have all raised critical questions about the motivations to force people into the camps, and whether more people died as a result of the fighting or because of the terrible living conditions in the camps and poor organization, management and delivery of emergency relief supplies.

The Acholi community in Uganda and the diaspora played an important role to push for peace negotiations and an end to the fighting. Religious leaders, political figures and transnational activists worked with both the Ugandan government and the rebels to encourage discussion and reconciliation (Nibbe 2010). In 2006 the second round of peace talks broke down between the Ugandan government

[3] Statistics about child abductions, casualties and the number of people are highly contested. The use of lower or higher figures are connected to political and economic motivations by different "experts", whether from the civil society, political activists or human rights monitors, or politicians and/or academics from different countries.

and the LRA (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010). By this time the rebels and the fighting had largely been pushed from Northern Uganda to neighbouring countries, and this final peace agreement was never signed. In the camps the years of 2006 to 2008 were a time of uncertainty as people were unsure whether it was safe to return to their homes, and local bandits or soldiers, looking to make some extra money, used the general instability and the climate of terror to their advantage for crimes of theft, rape and murder (Finnstromm 2008). By 2008 and 2009 the camps were closed by the government and people were told to return home. For many returnees this was a difficult process: some orphaned children had grown up in the camps and didn't know where their ancestral land was located; women who had lost their husbands were not welcomed home by their in-laws but instead chased away; and though forgiveness and amnesty became national and local priorities to re-build and recover, the reconciliation and a return to normalcy has not been easily or quickly achieved (Obika et al. 2012; Allen 2006).

Research on forgiveness and alternative justice mechanisms in Gulu are yielding new approaches for post conflict and peace building, though the challenges to achieve forgiveness and negotiate individual and larger social identities within communities is ongoing (Obika et al. 2012). Families and individuals who lost loved ones or were themselves marked by the violence of the war may today live as neighbours with rebels who have returned from the bush. These returnees also often labelled as victims of abduction and coercion. Beyond these social and relational challenges to build peace after the war within localized communities, the larger economic under-development of the entire region relative to other parts of the country, and the breakdown of knowledge transfer between generations has created many problems such as contested property ownership, and the loss of skills in farming and maintaining traditional water sources[4]. Returning to over-grown gardens that were inaccessible during displacement, homesteads that had been destroyed, the neglected infrastructure and the challenges of re-created communities of people, raised in camps and traumatized by war, living next to untrusted strangers, has made recovery and the post conflict present a tense and difficult time. Scarce resources to restart combine with problems of alcohol and substance abuse, alienation and disillusionment, especially among the youth many of whom are uninterested in school or manual labour, threaten to undermine the recovery and rehabilitation processes.

Recovery, rehabilitation and reconciliation have been especially difficult for those who were

[4] Traditionally older generations passed down knowledge and cultural lessons at night around campfires, and children gained skills and practice gardening and raising animals from a young age. In the IDP camps campfires were not allowed at night, and families lost their livestock and were unable to work in their gardens (Lenhart 2012).

displaced to the camps and unable to use extended family and kin networks to find a residence within Gulu town. The problems of aid dependence, interrupted educations, and domestic violence have been carried from the IPD camps back to people's home villages. For former abducted soldiers and rebel combatants who have returned under government Amnesty programs, re-integration, reconciliation and forgiveness in the community has been difficult for both the returnee and also the receiving community. Many households and families have lost members from the youngest, middle and oldest generations. Some rebels were forced to kill people from their own communities under orders, while others were willing participants in crimes of rape, abduction and property theft. Putting the violence of the past behind has not been easy for anyone in these recovering communities.

Many effects of the war, of international humanitarian aid, and of displacement and return, continue to the present day, as communities and individuals recover. One of the strategies for recovery that has made a significant impact is the formation of small self-help associations and organizations. These voluntary groups are creating opportunities for individuals and communities to take ownership of the recovery and development that is needed in the region after the war. Many international NGOs who came to the region during the war for humanitarian relief have transitioned or altered their activities to the post conflict context, and now provide their own development and livelihood projects, or partner with the smaller self-help, voluntary, groups. While there are many problems connected to the war that remain such as alcoholism, unemployment, domestic violence, and high costs for quality education and health services, there are many creative, community-driven solutions that are being pursued to confront and overcome these problems.

Gulu Town in 2013 is far removed from the violence and suffering that characterized life in the camps. Commerce is booming in the capital city of the Northern region, which is strategically located on the highway between Kampala and Juba, the capital of South Sudan. Agriculture prices are being driven up as brokers from South Sudan come to buy the much of the food needed in the world's newest nation ripe with oil and donor money (Nibbe 2010: 76). The streets of Gulu are crowded with cars and motorbikes, pedestrians and of course children. Early mornings and late evenings the streets are awash in bright colours of school uniforms, and the multicoloured print fabric with traditional African prints and motifs, known locally as *katanga* or sometimes *Nigerian wear*.

Many people on the outskirts of town live in single room huts with a grass thatch roof without electricity or running water similar to the villages in rural communities. In the town centre the more expensive multi-room apartments with indoor plumbing and electricity are increasingly popular for

those who can afford them. Motor cycle taxis and bicycles are the most popular means of transport, as other than a bus line to Lacor Hospital there is no public transportation within town. Bus companies operate between Gulu and other larger cities such as Kitgum and Juba to the north, Kampala to the South, Lira to the East and Arua to the west. Livestock is another common sight within town, especially as you move away from the downtown core. Cattle are grazed along the sides of roads where goats are tied amongst the tall grasses. During the day time streets are busy as women move around in their brightly coloured skirts and dresses, and men in trousers and collared shirts shout into their phones or joke with their friends in passing. And everywhere a white person passes you can expect children to come running, shouting "*munu*" or "*mzungu* HI!" and waving. From sun rise to sun set Gulu's streets and markets are loud with the sounds of life. Gunshots or other sounds of violence are rare.

While some international and development discourses suggest an imminent Malthusian population time bomb in Uganda, which has the youngest population and highest growth rates globally, others in Uganda suggest that this young population is a resource and will provide the work force to build Uganda's future. For much of the past two decades, despite the civil war in the North, Uganda and Musevini's NRM government has been a success story, posting high rates of economic growth, and pursuing neo-liberal economic reforms (Shaw and Mbabazi 2008). But rather than attention and discussion around economic indicators and European liberal theories there are alternative stories for investigation.

The alternatives from Gulu after the war, and the practices of local organizations and communities, are investigations into practices of liberation that re-write, and confront many elements in the history provided above. Moving away from an identity as victims of war or trauma, new identities as entrepreneurs, students and stakeholders are being created through their creative and community-integrated practices. While history is not something that should be, or can be, easily forgotten, Gulu and Uganda both have elements of history that need to be left in the past. The methods to write and re-write such histories should not be a colonially derived process or practice instead it should be shaped and owned from within the communities and the region. For those who look, these practices are easy to discover and present interesting and unexpected insights and opportunities.

Reflexivity and a choice of where to focus my attention

As a graduate student from Canada my own privilege, up-bringing and academic formation has given me a lot of anxiety and uncertainty in how to speak about Gulu. While I am quite moved by the

writing of anthropologists like Paul Farmer (2004), Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philip Bourgois (2004) to bring attention to structural violence and to embrace a more activist role to confront it, I am also wary of bringing attention to violence in distant places while ignoring violence within Canada, or becoming complicit in recycling stereotypes that the West is rich and peaceful, while the rest is impoverished and ravaged by violence. Slavoj Zizek articulates the concern of becoming complicit in violence and inequality through his own consideration of subjective violence, where philanthropists, activists and academics condemn and speak out against violence that they have played a role in creating whether knowingly or unknowingly (Zizek 2008). While I don't think structural or other violence should be abandoned or ignored, I also find it important that violence does not overwhelm or dominate the gaze in anthropology and other social sciences.

A very progressive and productive way to balance violence against resilience, survival and creativity is found in *Remaking a World* (2001), edited by Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman which is the third and final volume in a series that has considered social suffering and the subjectivities of violence. In this final volume the importance of alternative approaches to studies of violence and suffering, that include post conflict recovery and success to transcend the commercialization of victimhood (Das and Kleinman 2001: 24), with a focus on hope and the creativity of social practices, (Das and Kleinman 2001: 27) is convincingly argued with the selection of ethnographic chapters from different sites around the globe. Given the weight and entrenched visibility of tropes of Africa as a site of irrational and endemic violence, the orientation and arguments of Das and Kleinman in *Remaking a World* should be read more widely by academics, NGOs and media outlets who share their stories of Africa within and beyond the continent.

Following the approach of *Remaking a World* I use the writings of Frantz Fanon to move beyond a Eurocentric-focus and to better consider how liberation can be an alternative against liberalization. Fanon's writings are critical of simplistic divisions of the world which follow racialized tropes and hierarchies of knowledge, and challenge global power structures of inequality. Fanon rejected the pathways built upon Eurocentric foundations for the former colonies of the world, and instead insisted on liberation from these historical chains. This is the approach followed through out in this thesis, to instead discover pathways that are too often masked and that should not be read or understood according to market imperatives or a colonial world view. The success stories that follow are radically different in how they re-interpret and re-work imported knowledge and value systems, and the practice and intention of the creators of these stories. This is how I use and understand Fanon and the groups who have

contributed to this research. They are not trying to become European or working towards achieving goals or benchmarks brought from the outside. They have recognized that these are dead-ends and can only reinforce their marginalization. Instead they are bravely moving towards their own objectives and destinations, which should not be read or understood according to foreign measures and points of reference, as the creation of their own measures and points of reference is part of their struggle and part of the success they are achieving.

CHAPTER TWO Village Savings and Loan Associations- Creating Success though Community and Ownership

> In Acholi (tradition), you never worked alone. Each had his herd of cows and they organized a schedule so that a few boys from different families were able to care for everyone's cattle, and the work was shared. At the time for planting the whole community came together and they dig on this one's (field) today, tomorrow on the next, until all are finished. [Philip 22/10/2013]

The mobilization of local financial resources as a strategy for development was introduced in Gulu District during the war, in the displacement camps and within the Gulu town site, commonly known as *bol li cup*, savings circles or VSLA (Village Savings and Loan Associations). As the civil war and forced displacement dragged on for years, some NGOs shifted their focus from providing limited humanitarian relief supplies to longer term development projects, focusing particularly on women and soft skills training. These NGOs began training small groups of women in different skill sets and strategies for small income generating activities, and importantly collective group strategies to form savings and loans clubs. CARE International was a leader in this, bringing their "VSLA" model to the war affected north, after successful implementation in other parts of Uganda and other African countries, in partnership with grassroots partner organizations in Gulu. CARE and its partners trained Ugandan VSLA trainers, provided the savings books and other supplies for record keeping, and in some cases provided small amounts of start-up money to launch the savings and loan groups.

In the current post conflict context, after people have returned from the camps, an interesting shift has occurred which separates and distinguishes it from the original VSLA model introduced during the war, and provides a radically different approach micro finance practices found in other parts of the world. During my ethnographic research with one village savings group, Kica Ber, I was surprised to find many of the greatest successes of savings and loan practices are social achievements, more than economic accomplishments. Their success stories, collected through participant observation at meetings and individual interviews, are narratives of building and recovering their community through self-reliance and self-help. These stories contrast and challenge the negative tropes of African inability and dependence upon the outside for salvation, to bring peace and combat poverty, and offer an important

alternative approach to development that shifts the focus from individual economic agents and quantitative measures of success to more qualitative data that reflects group unity and harmony. VSLA practices are not creating the individualized market agents that neo-liberal and development policies of the World Bank and United Nations prescribe to empower and transform archaic and inefficient social communities into individual entrepreneurs and consumers through financial and market tools. The VSLA model, like many other strategies, priorities in development and development terminology, has been introduced from outside but interestingly it has been appropriated and re-fashioned to create unexpected, alternative outcomes. It has been embraced as a resistance strategy against the imposed neo-liberal priorities for development that places economic rationality and competition above social harmony, and instead becomes a means of struggle for liberation.

Unlike the more popular and well-known micro finance and other market based strategies embraced by many including the World Bank, the Grameen Bank, FINCA, and many large development NGOs and influential global players VSLA practices in Gulu are quite different. From the 1980s and '90s into the first decades of the new millennium, micro finance and micro credit have attracted a great deal of attention as an almost mythic, magic bullet to "unlock the potential of the world's poorest" (Yunus 1999). But there are sceptics who have raised warning flags that such practice leads to micro debt and exploitation by other means (Rahman 1999, Hulme 2000). Critical attention to the outcomes of micro finance and the risks involved in such a strategy to combat poverty or achieve development is extremely important, however, it does not fit well to the context and outcomes that can be discovered within the VSLA model in Gulu. It is not the economic impacts of savings and loans, nor the risks they can pose to create debt, that communities like Kica Ber position as their success stories, but rather VSLA is a creative strategy for empowerment and a means to manage tensions within these groups that allows a re-claiming of community through collective struggle.

Using Fanon's theories on liberation and identity to examine the struggles and successes of Kica Ber to build a self-reliant and united community, able to address the problems of poverty and trauma after the war, is an alternative theoretical lens that rejects classic European tropes of individuality and the capitalist strategy of replacing communities with markets. The successes of Kica Ber, and its alternative appropriation of the imported VSLA strategies and terminology, are a reminder that development can be framed by different objectives than catching up with Europe. Just as Fanon called for national unity as a necessary step for resistance, and towards liberation, ending colonial oppression and inequality, in the postcolonial and post conflict context of Gulu, VSLA is a strategy to unite people

into smaller, micro communities that can resist and transcend their marginalization and dependency upon larger, global economic forces and powers. Kica Ber, like Fanon, recognize the importance of unity, though theirs is at a smaller, more localized community level, instead of Fanon's larger national, and pan-African unity. In the fifth chapter there is a more complete discussion of the concepts of community, which is itself a very ambiguous term very often used in development discourse, informed through focus group discussion and analysis in Gulu, but for the moment the term is used cautiously, recognizing the problematic nature of the term. Though the community I read in Fanon's work is situated at a more national level, that can be closely read with Benedict Anderson's work on the social construction of the nation-state as a community (Anderson 1983), the importance of unity found in Fanon can also be applied to a smaller, micro-level in order to resist and confront inequality, power and oppression. It is through this lens focused on the struggle for liberation, and to overcome the chains of colonialism and racial inequality, as a means to re-assert a position of dignity and independence that Fanon's work is used as an alternative approach to fund-raising and micro finance by VSLA groups.

Kica Ber is a registered Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) with 43 members[5]. The group is a mix and overlap of families, friends and neighbours, composed of many married couples, grown children, siblings, cousins and clan mates. Though the group is a mix of men and women, it identifies itself, and is formally registered with the local government, as a women's group. The varied composition across genders and clans in Kica Ber is common for many women's savings clubs in Uganda (Tripp 1994: 118), a change that makes the groups more inclusive and open from the common structure of pre-colonial groups and associations formed amongst 'age mates' or within a single clan or chiefdom (Atkinson 1989). These members are bound to one another, united to improve their own lives and families through their hard work, by their commitment to the group and their respect for fellow members.

Kica Ber is not unique in registering as a women's group despite its mixed sex membership, as many of the “women's” groups I have met in Gulu District reflect this. The choice to label the group as “women's” group may in part be a strategic response to funding priorities of international NGOs and donors that target women's groups and associations. However their identity as a women's group is also a recognition of the importance of women's work and value, and to limit cultural values that grant men

[5] In 2014 four new members joined the group, including my wife Vicky. Recently I have been attending meetings with her, or in her name, when she is unable to attend.

greater social power, authority and prestige. As a women's group, the voices and perspectives of female members play an important part in guiding and directing the group. Women's savings and loan clubs tend to focus on the importance of domestic responsibilities, care for the family and harmony amongst members, even within women's market vendor associations where there is the added tension of direct market competition. Some savings circles and VSLA groups are for men alone, such as those in professional offices or male dominated industries like motor cycle taxi drivers. The reputation in Gulu for these male groups is that money and economic imperatives are much more important than in the women's groups, and social solidarity, harmony and unity are not as visible.

Recognizing that differences exist between members for many reasons, whether based on gender, income level, or age is important within Kica Ber. These differences are not hidden, but rather incorporated into the management and approach of the group. Recognizing their differences and their work to build unity and shared commitment within the group becomes both a definition and a measure of their success and the philosophy which directs their practice. Despite their differences the group must agree upon, and share, a common motivation and investment in one another. The construction of community through commitment and common purpose is part of what success means within Kica Ber: that the group remains united after four years, and continues to create opportunities for members to improve today and plan for tomorrow are successes. Rather than allowing differences to divide them, the group struggles to manage and navigate them. This allows the group to bring together members with relatively high incomes that own property, with landless members who struggle to save the smallest amounts on a weekly basis. In this way the members most in need of loans are able to access them from the savings of wealthier members which re-orients the concept of charity from an unbalanced relationship of giver and recipient, to one of co-operative solidarity and shared involvement.

* * * * *

A large mango tree offers shade from the Sunday afternoon sun, with the chairs and mats strategically positioned so that everyone sits under its protection. The group sits in a large circle with men sitting on one side in chairs, benches or on stools, while the women sit on papyrus reed mats on the opposite side. The women sit close to one another, whispering and laughing with each other. As the mats get over-crowded a member runs to fetch another from a nearby home. Some of the women choose to sit on chairs or stools, but position these along the edges of the mats; they rarely sit amongst the men.

When attending their meetings I always sat on a chair amongst the men, while Susan alternated sometimes sitting amongst the women on the mats, or in a chair next to me. Small children regularly attend with their parents or grandparents, seated in their laps, but often get bored and go off to play with friends. Infants, when not breast feeding, crawl or practice their walking amongst the seated members. They are always greeted with smiles, attention and affection, before they move to the next adult waiting to receive and entertain them.

During the months of the rainy season it is not uncommon to ignore the downfall of light showers as they begin, especially if they arrive as the meeting is nearing conclusion. But those weeks where the rain comes earlier, before all important business is completed, or when it arrives with a driving wind and fat raindrops that can soak your clothing instantly, the meeting is quickly relocated to one of the nearby homes, where people find ways to squeeze in. Here the seating divisions quickly become confused as people find space where they can, and the gendered division of seating partially break down, though whether inside or out the men don't sit on mats on the ground. As necessary, an extra chair is squeezed in, or people shift to squeeze an extra body on a couch or bench. Women may sit on the couches or chairs, but many sit on the ground, and when there are free spaces on the couch, especially next to the foreign researcher from Canada, mixing genders in seating arrangements brings friendly teasing and laughter. As an outsider, the division of gender within the meeting is striking, however such seating arrangements are common in Gulu, and reflects the daily habits and gender norms in Northern Uganda. Though it is rare for men not to sit on a chair, bench or stool, as a sign of prestige and respect, for women sitting on the ground in many ways seems to be a choice made out of habit, for comfort, and often so they can sit close to their friends, whispering back and forth and laughing at their own secret jokes.

Meetings follow a routine: they are brought to order and opened with a prayer, and will be closed at the end by another prayer. Members arriving late pay a small fine, which encourages punctuality. The chair person or another leader gives an opening address to the members that relays any new information or updates from past meetings. The treasurer and secretary read out the accounting for the savings collected and loans distributed the previous week, as well as running totals of outstanding debt for the year. Attendance for the meeting is taken, and the leaders enquire about members not present. Absent members are expected to send a message when they are unable to attend, especially if they have a loan owing to the group. The meeting then moves into the collection of money. People who have

brought money for loan repayments present their money to the "guards"[6], who count and organize the money carefully before turning it over to the treasurer and secretary from confirmation. Money is counted and recounted and totals announced to the entire group. Part of the radical difference of VSLA groups from other types of micro finance or development approaches is that there is (virtually) no outside money. All the money that can be given out in loans is collected from the savings and loan repayments of the members. All the transactions of money in and out are recorded by the treasurer and secretary in their books, verified by calculator, and match the with the count of money on in the savings buckets. Before the loans are distributed members must sign the record books to acknowledge receiving the loan and confirming the amount.

As noted above, the Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) model is different from micro-finance or other development and aid projects, because the money that pays for growing a business, paying school fees or other activities is collected within its own members: they are self-financing their own development[7]. In contrast to critiques of micro-finance that recognize the risks of debt and exploitation of people who are already economically marginalized (Rahman 1999; Hulme 2000;), VSLA instead positions savings first, and the loans that go out are simply the savings of the group re-cycled. The critical studies of large micro finance institutions, such as Grameen Bank, and other models developed in the global south, and the multi-national World Bank micro finance and micro credit policies, that have sceptically examined the outcomes, successes and ideology of micro-finance build on many years of earlier, critical scholarship and studies in development, modernization and globalization (Hobart 1993, Illich 1997). A central question within such studies is whether the methodologies, theories and approaches of the powerful actually do combat poverty, or simply preserve power inequalities thereby situating development as a continuation or revision of colonialism. While such critical attention is extremely important, especially with regard to large, financially powerful multinational organizations like the IMF, World Bank and large international NGOs or banks, such critiques need to be re-considered in light of VSLA. While it was a large international NGO, CARE International, that introduced the methodology and provided the early trainings, today the vast majority of VSLA groups act with autonomy, and provide their own funding. They can not put themselves in

[6] Guard is a title given to the appointed members who handle the money, collecting the fines, loan repayments and savings contributions. The guards receive the money as the secretary and treasurer make their entries in the record books, after which the guards organize the money making it easier to re-count and confirm.

[7] Some VSLA groups do receive money from the outside, often as start-up money, or to grow their collective pool for the loans. From my own experiences and stories heard in the field, for most of the groups who have received outside money this is very small amount relative to the group's collective weekly savings.

debt, at least not at a group level to a larger, outside entity, because the money is their own. In fact, because it is the members own money that is allowing for, and leading to, changes and improvements in their communities it can also be appropriately called fund-raising.

VSLA groups like Kica Ber provide an example to challenge the stereotypes on and off the continent that Africans are unable to create their own solutions to poverty and other challenges in their communities. While some European and North American studies have focused upon their own history of generosity and philanthropy (Robbins 2006), abroad and at home, there is little attention paid to how Africans invest and give within their own communities. VSLA is a radically different view and approach to fund-raising, because the money returns to the donor, who is also a beneficiary. Rather than a hierarchical structure that divides the wealthy and able from the poor and unable, by economic or geographic markers, the unity amongst the group transcends these divisions to focus upon a unified, shared objective. It is their own hard work and their own money that is raising-up their lives and improving their communities. The leader of Kica Ber, Charles Watmon, explained that VSLA groups mobilize their own money as one of the multiple reasons that the practice was successful.

> One thing is that there is no financial support from outside the group. VSLA save their own money, they don't start with money from outside. Second, money is generated from within the members so it is their money, *and they are serious about their money*. People can't play around with the money, and if someone takes my 50 000 (Ugandan shillings) in a loan then I will follow up on that money. The money is generated from within the members so it is our money. Third, the loan system is within the members and it is easy, unlike when you want to go and borrow from the bank, that is hard and tiring, but in VSLA it is just easy so the members feel happy. We are not bothered to go to the LC (local government) or to the bank. The reason VSLA started was because in those days it wasn't possible for members to access loans. And four, VSLA has been strong because it works with members from within a locality- it is very bad if people come from far areas, but need to all be from close around. They come and share out their problems, they support one another and they all know each other because they are from near around. [Charles 29/11/2013]

It is through this practice of self-help and standing alone that Kica Ber and other VSLA groups are able to achieve their liberation. By raising their own money to pursue their own projects and

solutions Kica Ber is not dependent upon any outsiders, instead they are able to resist the negative and corrosive effects of dependency brought by foreign aid and the legacy of imposed marginality and inability cast upon Africa and Africans. I use the terms self-help, discipline, independence and success carefully, in part because of how these terms are used in radically different ways by very different actors and power hierarchies. While World Bank literature and neo-liberal development discourses have embraced the ideals and ethics of classical economic and social theories of self-made men, the Protestant work ethic (Weber 2005), and the solutions to Africa's problem being found within its communities (Sachs 2005), the practices of Kica Ber's liberation can not be adequately understood through these frameworks or according to such metrics. Kica Ber is re-appropriating the practices and discourses of development that have been carried over from Europe and America, instead of blindly embracing them. While individual achievements of sending children to school, improving homes and individual economic prosperity are pursued, these are only one effect within a larger process that creates and strengthens community rather than transcends, dissolves or moves beyond it. Kica Ber's savings and loans are not constructing economic individuals according to European theories and expectations, but instead challenge individual achievement as the most important measures for success. To better understand the objectives and successes of Kica Ber's activities it is important to look closely at ideas and expectations of collective identity and communal successes outside European theories of economic development and the individual.

Kica Ber as a success story for VSLA model

Kica Ber means *mercy is good*, and as many members narrated their own stories, it emerges that a spirit of mercy, respect and love unites the group and directs its leaders and members. Surprisingly, in a group whose central activities are savings and loans, the economic benefits are secondary in importance. Instead the members recognize the bonds of solidarity, the emotional escape and support offered by a listening ear and a word of advice, or the guidance from the group as being the greatest successes and accomplishments that arise from their participation in the group. Meetings offer an important opportunity for members to socialize and to combat depression, trauma, and other scars left by the war. Simply *"*being together with each other is good and helps*"* was a success that all the members touched upon in their interviews. As one member, Julia, said "It is bad to sit alone. Being with other people, talking, helps to make me forget my problems." [08/10/2013]

The formation of the group is not enough to bring it success however, it requires hard work and

commitment of members over time to maintain and grow the group. Unfortunately many VSLA groups have failed because of divided objectives and expectations within the membership, greed, jealously or poor leadership among other causes[8]. Kica Ber's members unanimously recognized that organization structure and strong leadership are important for groups to succeed. A constitution and rules of operation written and approved by the members, and procedures to resolve and manage conflicts within the group are all important for groups to work and remain together. Strong leadership and accountability are necessary to manage their activities involving money and to ensure that problems do not divide the group. The treasurer and the secretary play especially key roles, as they are entrusted with the record keeping and financial management of the group. Clear and simple record keeping systems are very important given that some members within the groups have limited education and literacy. In the absence of the treasurer or secretary another member must temporarily step in and take the records to avoid conflicts and disagreements later when the loan and saving cycle closes at the end of the year.

In many of the interviews and informal conversations with members from Kica Ber and from discussions during the workshop in November (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5), it is often the leaders who hold groups together or bring about their downfall. Talking about a different group she had joined before Kica Ber, Betty expressed her frustration of disappointment and financial loss.

> "I was part of a different group for one year, but I knew before the end of the year came that there would be problems. When we closed the circle in December there wasn't any money to give back. The leaders took it and ran away to the village." [08/09/2013]

In her study of urban savings groups in Uganda and Tanzania, Political Scientist Aili Tripp has also reported on the importance and power of leadership to bring success or prevent it within a group, and as such why it is important that groups build their own frameworks for accountability (Tripp 1994:122). Many savings and loan groups have fallen apart because of corruption or poor financial management by the leaders. The success of a group, especially over a sustained period, depends on the investment and commitment of the membership, and it is the leaders who must encourage and foster these. Leaders also have a responsibility act as role models within their groups and communities. The

[8] In the field I often heard of many VSLA groups failed, though interestinglhy failure rates for VSLA groups in Uganda reported by Care International provide mixed statistics that are not very clear (Allen 2002:56).

majority of the members of Kica Ber recognize traits such as “empathy, patience, compassion and honesty” as necessary for effective leadership, as they encourage the members not to get discouraged, and are understanding when an emergency like a sickness delays repayments. The leaders at Kica Ber also recognized their responsibilities to encourage and hold the group together, and were proud that the success of the group reflected their hard work and their ethics of responsibility to the group. I still laugh thinking back to the Treasurer's wide smile as he explained that one of his greatest successes within Kica Ber was that it “has made me famous” [Geoffrey 13/10/2013]. People knew and respected him for his hard work and for the many good things his group had brought to the community.

Within Kica Ber currently most of the elected leaders are men due to their higher levels of education. The leaders and entire membership are working towards transitioning to new leaders, and are actively encouraging more women to take over the leadership positions. There are challenges that this presents: ensuring that the record keeping and procedures do not become too complicated, and that women with the necessary skills volunteer to fill these roles in the coming years or that steps are taken to help them gain these skills. There are also gender inequalities and different perceptions that resonate with the challenges that women in the west have had to overcome as they joined the work force and came into positions of greater power and influence in the 20th century in Canada, the USA and Europe. These take shape in comments by some members about how women gossip too much, don't know how to manage a group or lack other critical skills. However there is also a clear difference between what people say and what they do. At the close of the year in 2013 when some of the leaders expressed interest in stepping down from their elected positions, it was young, and relatively well educated women, who were elected as the vice secretary, vice treasurer and vice-chair person. My understanding is that at the end of 2014 it is likely that these women in these vice- positions will replace their male counterparts and sit as secretary, treasurer and chair. This preparation for the future encourages skills and knowledge sharing that helps to empower these individuals, strengthens the group's future, so that it is not too reliant upon only a few members, and perhaps most importantly takes a step towards greater gender equality and a balance of powers that gives a positive example to all the women of the group.

On *Ber Bedo*

One of the challenges for book keeping, and why the role of secretary and treasurer require more advanced mathematics skills and literacy, is the existence of two different loan accounts. The first account, called the *savings account*, charges 10 % interest on loans. The second account, called *ber*

bedo, gives small short term loans interest free[9]. *Ber bedo* in Luo, the local language, translates to social welfare or well-being. The word 'ber' is an adjective that translates to good, or beautiful. 'Bedo' translates as to sit or to be grounded, thus ber bedo is to live good or to stay well. This account exists to maintain and improve the quality of life, with effects reaching out beyond the individual member to include their family and also their surrounding community. An Acholi proverb I heard was that " a man can not sleep well if his neighbours are hungry" [Charles 29/11/2013] and I find this closely connects to the underlying ideas of community and unity that are reflected in the ber bedo savings and loans of VSLA groups.

Loans from this ber bedo are generally small, from 1 000 to 50 000 Ugandan shillings (Canadian dollar equivalency is approximately $ 0.40 - $ 22.00). These loans are interest free, but must be repaid within two weeks otherwise a small penalty of 1 000 UGX is added weekly until the loan is paid. Loans from ber bedo are directed towards improving the lives of the members and their families, as the name suggests. Because members can't draw a second loan from the savings account until they have paid the first in full, ber bedo allows members to draw small amounts of money to cover monthly expenses in times of need. Buying food in the house or other small supplies like cooking oil and soap, or buying animal feed are common uses for these small loans. Using both the savings and ber bedo loans strategically members are able to balance their different responsibilities. A member can draw a large savings loan that will be paid back slowly over several months to pay school fees for the children or invest in business. While they are repaying the savings loan they can continue to draw small regular loans from ber bedo for feeding, medical expenses or other activities dedicated to improving the quality of life at home.

Loans from ber bedo are especially important for members who earn their income according to irregular or external schedules, such as harvest seasons for farmers or women who do informal work such as weeding in their neighbours' gardens. The ber bedo loans are interest free in recognition of the fact that they aren't typically used for business investment or more luxurious purchases, but rather to ease survival strategies and to reduce the stress upon members. Ber bedo gives insight into how savings and loan practices are a communal activity that goes beyond a simple alternative form of banking or fund-raising. The members of Kica Ber recognize the importance of unity and the role of community in development, to promote belonging and a sense of security that go beyond the individual. In many ways

[9] From limited research with another VSLA group and stories heard in Gulu, virtually all VSLA groups have this two loan account format, both savings and *ber bedo.*

the existence of ber bedo as an interest free loan is a collective recognition, and rejection, of their economic marginalization within the global economy. Given the high interest rates of commercial banks and the rising costs of social services such as education and health in Northern Uganda, the groups are creating a community which can provide a social resource net that the state has failed to provide and neo-liberal privatization has undermined. All the members know that at any time an unexpected expense may arise, but they do not need to live in anxiety of those moments because they also know they have access to interest free loans in cases of emergency or short term need.

Within VSLA the individual members, like the group, have to be autonomous and independent. A member can not fail to repay a loan--large or small-- to the group. Access to credit and small interest free loans create a very valuable support network, and as such must be maintained. In order to draw larger loans members must provide collateral or "security", usually in the form of assets they own. In 2013 one member risked having items from her home sold off to repay her outstanding loans at the end of the year, but the group was able to negotiate a solution where her husband, who is also a member, was required to cover her debt from his own savings. VSLA groups have come to provide a means of security which has to stand in for welfare assistance, which is not provided by the state, because of limited resources, bureaucracy and corruption as well as the spread of global, neo-liberal transformations of the past 30 years that have largely privatized sectors and services once provided by the state. In response to this VSLA has emerged as a type of survival strategy. However it must also be noted that beyond a survival strategy to manage failings of the state or global economic re-alignment, the approach of VSLA is also empowering its members, as they possess a high level of ownership for their successes. They have improved their lives, through their savings and through their repaid loans, which challenges any notions of African inability to address the problems of poverty.

I often smiled in disbelief at Judith, who every two weeks would collect the same loans of 3 000 UGX ($1.50). I used to wonder at first what she would do with such a small sum of money, and also why she didn't take a larger loan, as I assumed she needed it. But, over time, I came over time to better understand that this small bi-weekly strategy allowed her better planning and management over her household budget. Drawing a small loan each two weeks she was able to buy a small amount of food, beyond what she harvested from her garden, and other necessities at home for her, her daughter and the grandchildren who stayed with her. She had two weeks to find a means to earn the money to pay back the loan, and once repaid the cycle would begin again. She had found an amount that for her was manageable: she was able to meet her immediate needs with the small loan, and the size was

manageable that she would be able to find some small work in a neighbour's garden weeding or doing other activities that would allow her to repay her loan in time. If even at a very slow pace, she is improving her living situation and the future for her daughter and grandchildren.

I highlight the ber bedo loan account because of how it contrasts with European banking and economic theory, by encouraging unity within the group, and collective investment in achievement beyond the individual. Ber bedo is a shared survival strategy to ensure that when basic needs can't be met that members can draw short term loans, and goes beyond limited economic theories of rational decision making as maximizing an individual's benefit. In her study of rotating savings and loans groups in Uganda, economist Lisa Peterlechner agrees that while each individual member increases her benefits by saving with the group (Peterlechner 2009:124), this is not the primary reason why these groups exist, rather there is a strong social influence that goes beyond the economic theory to build trust, impart a sense of belonging and identity, and that creates opportunities to share knowledge and solidarity (Peterlechner 2009: 31). Just as Peterlechner notes, it is important to bring attention to the benefits and motivations beyond quantitative measures, and economic models and theory, in order to understand the success and liberation that are woven into VSLA practices. To look closer at the benefits that lie outside economic measures I will look more closely at one particular member of Kica Ber and her success story.

Rose's Story[10]

> In the group we sing songs and do traditional dancing. This helps to socialize members and to build new friendships. Financially I have seen people's lives changed. There are people now doing large scale farming, or have built houses with the money they got. For some others they pick loans to buy new grass thatch to replace the roof (of their hut) so they have less problems in rainy season and with children getting sick. [Rose 26/09/2013]

> All of us knew very little about financial management and I give an example of my sister here, Rose. When we started the group she was afraid to take the loan and would always say that she had nothing to do with the money so the chairperson kept on

[10] A pseudonym is used to protect Rose's identity

> encouraging her to take a loan to begin selling charcoal because that is the way she can develop herself. This is an example of how she never knew how to use money and of which the group trained her to. [Agnes 15/09/2013]

Rose doesn't strike me as a shy or fearful woman. A founding member of Kica Ber, she was also among the first members of Kica Ber who excitedly offered to share her story with Susan and me. Rose and I are linked through a familial bond- I am her *muko* (brother in law): my wife's family is from the same clan as Rose's husband, thus we are (somehow) related. When the group first learned that I was married to a daughter of Payira clan, Rose immediately started cheering and informed me that I am married to her mother[11]. I have chosen Rose's story to share in part because of this bond. Her own story of success closely mirrors that of many others, and as an elderly woman in the group she holds a position of respect and authority that make her a good candidate as a representative Kica Ber. In November, Rose was selected by the group to attend the workshop, where she shared her own stories of success, and those of her group. She also was one of the members that was most excited and vocal in her narrative and reflections, describing how her community and her neighbour's lives had been transformed by Kica Ber. She has watched these transformations more closely than many other members, living near the centre of her village, with her hut located only a hundred meters from where the group holds its weekly meetings.

On the day of her interview we found her home, cleaning around the compound, and supervising young children taking their lunch and attending to chores. She directed us to wait for her under the shade of the mango tree where Kica Ber meets each week. After a few minutes, she walked slowly but with great dignity over to us, then struggled to lower herself on to the mat with her walking stick, after shaking our hands and greeting us a second time. According to cultural values Rose treats me with a lot of respect as an in-law and a visitor to her home. She is something of a mother figure in the group: she is one of the eldest members, and many of her own children, nieces and nephews are members. Though the effects of age have marked her body, especially her hands and feet which bear creases and cracks from years of physical labour in the garden, her face has resisted time with its smooth skin, bright eyes

[11] Though Rose is much older than both Vicky and myself, this suggestion that Vicky is her mother, , resonates and connects to Radcliffe Brown (1940) Gluckman's work (1956) and other studies in African kinship systems about the blurring of generations and kinship terms to reflect social relations in East Africa. Rose was not the only women I met in Gulu who despite being much older would insist that Vicky is her mother. I'm not sure if this was a way to show respect, or if because of their own knowledge about individual family lineages within the clan and my wife's families' social position relative to others.

and shining teeth. Currently she is raising four orphaned grandchildren, thus Kica Ber is an invaluable life line and support network for her. Before our interview began she gave a short prayer, thanking God for our arrival and for Kica Ber, and praying for our safe journey back home and the continued success in the group.

Like many of the women in the group, Rose farms to earn her small money for savings, to repay her loans, and to feed the family. Though she is now too old to do some of the more physical tasks of farming she uses her loans to hire others to dig and plant in the garden. Because she doesn't have a large piece of land for farming she is strategic and plants crops that harvest quickly such as *bo,* a leafy green vegetable similar to spinach that grows quickly and is a regular ingredient in many Ugandan dishes, and that can be easily and quickly sold in the local markets. The crops from the garden she can choose to sell or consume them home, but much of her food, like *posho* (maize flour) and cooking oil have to be purchased and require cash.

> I usually take small loans from Ber bedo and then pay them back. I can buy small food with them, and I get a loan from the group and then use that to hire people to dig in the garden for me. If I can sell off some of the seed or greens I can repay the loan, but mostly we just eat the food home. (Rose 29/09/2013)

Part of the explanation for the emergence and popularity of women's associations is in response to a weakening state because of neo-liberal economic policies and reforms dictated from outside such as Structural Adjustments imposed by the World Bank and IMF (Tripp 1994:125), that have forced women to join the market economy, as public services for health and education are becoming increasingly privatized and charge user fees. Rose, like many people in Northern Uganda who don't have a stable or sufficient wage income, engages in numerous diverse economic activities to raise or save a small amount of money to provide for her family. Poultry projects, burned bricks, and harvests from the garden such as sweet potato or beans can all be used for commercial sale, to earn money to pay these expenses and become more self-sufficient. However investing loans in small commercial ventures does present risks. It has been a challenge for the leaders of the groups to encourage members like Rose to use loans to engage in business, as noted in her friend's comment about Rose's fear and inexperience. As a result of the reluctance of members like Rose to take loans in 2010 Kica Ber voted to modify the model for VSLA practice of dividing the interest at the end of the year based on each member's savings.

Instead of dividing the total interest collected by the group based on savings, which rewards those who save the most, the interest is now tied to the loans, and as long as the borrower repays all their loans before the end of the year then they recover back their entire interest paid as an incentive to take loans.

Despite this change Rose draws her loans mostly from the ber bedo (social welfare) account, so she does not pay or collect interest. Like many of the members she buys food, cooking oil, soap and other small household necessities. Though she continues to struggle to develop a business in which she can invest larger loans, outside the home she uses her larger loans, which draw interest, to pay the school fees for her grandchildren. Because she can't afford a large enough loan to pay the fees in one single payment she pays in instalments strategically, timing her loans so the school term is not disrupted for the children, who will get sent home from school for late payment of fees. All the members know well this school calendar and at which points in the semesters students will be sent home from school until their fees are paid. For Rose and many others ensuring their children and grandchildren are able to complete their education, and not suffer from these interruptions or stigma of being chased from school for late payments, is only possible because of Kica Ber's loans and savings. It is a struggle and strategy maintained through the year to ensure that she saves for the coming year's tuition, clears her loans before the end of the year, and keeps everyone fed and clothed in her home. It is not easy, but she also doesn't let it defeat her. With the modification of Kica Ber's policy on how to divide the interest at the end of the year, members like Rose who don't use loans for business but instead to pay the costs for a public education and health sector that now charges user fees, the group doesn't benefit from her unfortunate financial struggles. Instead she re-collects the interest to increase her total savings through the year and prepare for the next school year, and the next loans, to come.

Though the economic impacts of loans and savings are the most visible success from Kica Ber, they are not the most important successes achieved. Instead, it is the social and emotional support provided by the group that are the stories of success that Rose and others focus upon. One example is the singing and other activities were brought in, after the group had started. Recognizing the social benefits and the enjoyment of the members Rose and other leaders organized singing and dancing for the women.

> It is good that we know how to receive visitors and this group makes us more social. We can laugh and sing and praise God. These things keep us united and grow the love between the members. When I come every Sunday I can interact with people in the

> group. I enjoy so much spending time socializing. You can pick good lessons and get sensitization from others. Here you can share ideas about how to sing songs, how to perform traditional dances, how to welcome visitors, based on the advice of one another. We started doing the music and other activities after the group was formed, it came out in the meetings. [Rose 26/09/2013]

Though recognition of the social benefits and social connections that Kica Ber brings is not lost on its members, it has not been adequately recognized and incorporated in much of the academic literature on VSLA ROCSA (rotating credit and savings associations), and other micro savings strategies (Tripp 1994; Peterlechner 2009; Hamer 1981; Rahman 1999; Hendricks 2011). The focus on economic or political explanations and rationale fails to include the importance of the social creativity and value of such practices, or a recognition of how these are alternatives to a world constructed and explained by European rationality alone. Particularly in light of the changes that Kica Ber has made to the VSLA model regarding how to distribute back interest to the members, where the interest belongs to the person who takes the loan and not to those who deposit their savings, economic theory and rationale are turned upside down about behaviour and incentives. The members do not save in the group as a means to grow their money, but rather they save together because of the impact those savings can make in the success of the group. They are investing in a collective success, not an individualized one.

Beyond the emotional and social support that VSLA provides, the groups also carry social capital which can influence the behaviour of members. There is pressure to maintain a good reputation in the group, to ensure trust that the loans will be honoured and that a member should be a good ambassador for the group. This social pressure is called *yup nyi* in Luo. Within Kica Ber, Rose had observed how the rules and *yup nyi* had helped members to correct their behaviour, especially with regards to alcohol.

> The rules in the group have brought positive social change, like the rule that you can't attend meetings drunk. This is helping some members. When the group first started some people were coming drunk. So they added a fine of 5 000 for coming to meetings drunk. So somehow it has changed their drinking habits. [Rose 26/09/2013]

The power of groups to change their communities by mobilizing local tools and resources can‘t be overlooked. The savings and loans strategies introduced by CARE International and other groups

because of the barriers to access the formal banking sector, and during the war as an alternative to dependence on foreign aid. The group plays a pivotal role in this because there are so many barriers to individual savings for people like Rose who are excluded from the banking sector because of the relatively high costs for loans and the bureaucratic procedures and paper work to open an account. Groups instead are able to build on the local knowledge and cultural practices of community and solidarity. The pressure to save money and to be involved in the group are pro-social pressures that re-cast the identities of members from victims of inability, poverty and dependency to agents who direct and own the changes in their individual lives and in their communities.

Though Rose is one of the members in Kica Ber who are struggling just to make ends meet, she managed to collect a small savings in December after paying back her final loans of the year. She remains committed to the group, and prays for the continued growth and success of the group, understanding that the challenges in her life, in the life of her children and grandchildren will not be solved easily or quickly. The work ahead is her's to complete, and with the grace of God and the blessing of Kica Ber in her life, she is confident in her success.

> Sometimes I don't have any money. I can go to meetings in three consecutive weeks without having the money. Members will encourage each other to save or to give advice, but we don't help each other with loans. If you want money you pick it from the group, but I don't get a loan from an individual but from the group. That is not why it's there. Your friends help you to build yourself up, they don't build you. With God and Kica Ber we will succeed!"

From my own participant observation at meetings and in conducting individual interviews with the members of Kica Ber it was very obvious that despite economic and social tensions and pressures the group relied on building strong bonds and that the unity of the group was also bringing unity to the wider community. While VSLA groups are making an impact on the financial lives of its members I found that it was the social and emotional resources it was mobilizing within communities to be its greatest strength. The recurrent success story I heard amongst the members of Kica Ber, especially the women, is how the group helped its members to navigate the problems and hardships that arose in their lives. These groups allow women to build strong bonds of friendship and solidarity, that were able to replace some of the social support network that had existed before the war when many Acholi still lived

near clan and/or extended family members. For many members attending the meetings are as important as the money they can save or the loans they can withdraw.

Rather than looking at Kica Ber through an economic lens as rational individual actors, it is important to consider an alternative view that recognizes the collective subjectivity of Kica Ber as a community, and the creativity of Kica Ber to resist and modify the imported practice of savings and loans. Kica Ber offers an alternative understanding of what development means, and transcends divisions of class and income level in an innovative manner that allows weaker members financially to benefit from stability and access to credit through the wealthier members.

Differing from much of the academic attention on micro savings and micro loans that situates the practice and its actors within the dominant, globalized modern economic paradigm, sociologist Jacques Gelinas recognizes the power of savings clubs and similar associations in the global south as a radically different strategy to overcome global economic inequality and the negative effects of foreign aid in his book *Freedom from Debt* (1994). Gelinas recognizes the power of African practices such as ROCSA (Rotating Credit and Savings Associations) and market guilds as innovative ways to re-design and integrate development according to community values and resources (Gelinas 1994: 119). Such groups challenge the formal structures, such as the banking sector, which move the wealth and resources of Africa abroad, and the impacts of the interference by the IMF, World Bank and other international institutions in African economies. Though Gelinas' attention is largely on the economic influence, resistance and impact in the emergence of local practices as tools to reclaim ownership, given the attention and emphasis within Kica Ber on the social and community well-being, I would extend Gelinas' assertion that collective practices in Africa and other places in the global south are acts of reclamation in opposition to their marginality and inequality, and that transcend economic empowerment and ownership. It is individual and community identities that are being reclaimed at Kica Ber, as well as reclaiming the tools to build and direct their own futures.

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VSLA is one of many community-built alternatives for savings that allows for creative ways to recast and reclaim identity and development. I have heard of other forms, such as *Kalulu* groups, where each member contributes a fixed amount weekly and according to a regular schedule each member receives the entire savings pot in rotation. Sometimes this money is awarded as a loan to be repaid,

while in other groups the money is simply given to the member, though in such cases there are also rules to protect against receiving the money and then leaving the group before all the other members have received their share. My research assistant Susan is a member of a group for savings and shopping: each member puts in a fixed amount each week and every two weeks, according to a set schedule, the entire group moves to purchase large household items which are not easy to save for individually. After two weeks the group moves together with the next member in rotation to make her purchases in the market. Amongst the market traders in one area of Gulu I also heard of a strategy where the members use the power of buying in bulk to their advantage, thus all the members contribute weekly to buy wholesale the salt, cooking oil and other non-perishables they need for the month.

It would be wrong to suggest that VSLA or other savings clubs are only popular amongst small traders or farmers. Some of the members in Kica Ber hold posts as teachers, development workers or other salaried jobs from which they draw a monthly income. While Rose and many of the women who engage in mainly informal economic activities of farming, selling produce or tailoring, in Gulu it is not uncommon for people with formal sector jobs to form savings clubs within their work place. VSLA is not a marginal strategy for the poor, nor a model embraced only by middle and lower income earners as it was first introduced to Northern Uganda. I have heard stories of VSLA groups formed by affluent men who hold government posts, own large businesses or work as bank managers. In such groups savings in the hundreds and thousands of dollars (millions of Ugandan shillings) can be brought in weekly, and members are able to draw loans from the group that are comparable in size to loans they could access from the bank or other formalized financial channels. There are also multiple groups whose members are primarily *boda boda* (motorcycle) taxi drivers. In such groups members can pick loans large enough to buy their first motorcycle, instead of hiring their bike from the owner on a monthly basis, or upgrade their older bike for a newer one as a means to reduce fuel costs and improve their competitive edge by carrying their clients on a newer, quieter machine.

Kica Ber's stories and successes, like those of other savings and loans groups, as well as the the practices of different locally based organizations and associations, from Gulu and other parts of Northern Uganda need to be recognized, celebrated and understood outside the limited lenses of European modernity and economic rationality, otherwise a fundamental element, that of liberation, is lost. Rather than continuing down the old paths of development and modernization that Europe used to justify colonialism and continues as an under-tone in debates and policies to fix or save Africa (Bayart 2004), it is important to consider how the local practices in Gulu are steps towards liberation from

Europe's imposed inferiority and racial inequality. As Fanon has written, to achieve liberation it is not possible to remain within the limited and racist opportunities offered by Europe (Fanon 2004:236) instead they must be transcended and destroyed. In order to understand the success and politics of Kica Ber and others in Gulu, it is important that we recognize the creativity and struggle of these alternative practices, and the important role of African communities in development and in building their own futures.

The village savings and loan (VSLA) models merit further investigation and consideration because of how they work against ideas and expectations of market liberalization and social change so often found as ideological foundations and guidelines for development in Africa. Rather than continue to investigate and write about how African projects designed by the World Bank or other wealthy development agencies fail to achieve the benchmarks and measures for success imposed from the outside, the alternative development strategies VSLA bring to light, and ways they can correct, many of the reasons why Western directed development may be failing. Though VSLA's original model was introduced from outside, the ways it has been re-worked and re-fashioned bring to light the innovative and creative potential in Gulu, and perhaps more broadly Africa, to design their own solutions and to find ways to move beyond any type of imposed dependency or marginality from outside the continent.

Drawing on Fanon to consider liberation instead of liberalization, it is easy to recognize and understand why investment by the community, instead of donations and directions from abroad, are more effective to empower, to achieve their objectives and to bring about improvements in the quality of life in Gulu. This question of investment within development projects, and important attention to the scale and location of development projects, and specifically NGO activities, is considered further in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE Experiences with an NGO in Northern Uganda: A different view on development

> I first found out about Sports Outreach because my children were going to the nursery school. A neighbour told me it was free and close to home so I took them there. That is when I learned about their family strengthening and the piggery projects. With their help I built where to keep pigs and they gave me a pair of them. Sports Outreach has helped my life so much. As I got closer to them I started going to Church where I learned about Jesus and stopped working as a witch doctor. They have helped me so much. Now my children are healthier and my life is easier. The pigs and goats I got help me to pay the school fees for my older children.
>
> (Judith, Beneficiary of Family Strengthening in Koro Abili)

The arrival of NGOs and humanitarian relief organizations during the civil war, especially between the years of 2003 to 2008 radically transformed the social landscape of Northern Uganda. Some of the impacts and transformations that occurred connect to larger debates about development (Escobar 1995, Hobart 1993, Illich 1997), the increasing power and presence of NGOs globally (Ferguson and Gupta 2002), and the role of NGOs in Africa (Holmen 2010; Dill 2010; De Waal 1999; 1993;) in the social sciences. However there are also surprising ways in which the debates and critiques around NGOs and development fail to connect with, or address, the practices of smaller, regional and national NGOs based in Uganda. Much of the scholarly attention has largely focused upon large, global organizations, but such attention risks silencing and marginalizing alternative perspectives and practices of these smaller NGOs that are locally oriented rather than transnational or global in character.

While this scholarly focus is of great value for critical studies and interrogations of power, many of these studies are limited in their consideration by western theories that frame development as market oriented and driven by capitalist motivations alone. Such studies differ little from earlier eras of development-as-tools for nation-building, with a focus on political and economic influences and wealth creation. Where these arguments differ is on the end product: whether NGOs and development achieve positive or negative outcomes.

One of the challenges to understanding and studying NGO activities in Uganda is the complexity and multiplicity of scales and many differing orientations adopted by the different NGOs and

development practitioners, both national and international. In the case of Northern Uganda's recovery after the war, the political economic (and market oriented) approach used by many scholars of NGOs and development in Africa miss much of the unique, and innovative potential for the smaller, more locally situated NGOs to offer alternatives where market liberalization is replaced by community liberation. The NGO presented in this chapter, Sports Outreach Ministry (SOM), is different and an alternative, I argue, from the depiction of NGOs as agents of neo-liberalism and capitalist imperialism and expansion. Rather than re-creating and recycling negative images of Africa to solicit donor support or preaching social and economic change in order to catch-up with global (western) norms and standards, the philosophy and practices at SOM are here examined through a lens of liberation and self-reliance that closely connects to Fanon's writings about African intellectuals as opposed to colonized intellectuals (2004: 178), and his arguments about the rights of former colonial subjects to reparations and justice instead of charity or aid (Bhabha 2004: xvi). Searching for alternative ways to consider and position African NGOs from their larger, more global counterparts, I draw upon my own experiences working closely with a small faith-based Ugandan NGO that I have known for many years.

From August to December 2013 I took part in an internship at Sports Outreach Ministry (SOM), that I came to know through its partnership with the Concordia Volunteer Abroad Program (CVAP), a small student funded non-profit organization at Concordia University. In 2009 I spent two months assisting in a house building project with SOM staff and fellow Concordia student volunteers. In subsequent years this relationship has been maintained, and I often visited the farm for an afternoon or attended Sunday morning prayers at their church. Participating in this internship at SOM as part of my field research allowed me to share in and observe a variety of different activities within the organization. It also gave me an opportunity to reflect on some of the dis-junctures between my own previous experiences in development and SOM's Christian ideology, as well as SOM's different orientation toward development from what I encountered in many of the academic studies and the varied critiques of NGOs in Africa.

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Before I discuss the activities and success stories at SOM, it is important to discuss the different types of NGOs and their practices and orientations. Because of the many different sizes and shapes of NGOs found in Gulu, it is necessary to situate them as best as possible based upon their location, size

and their relationships with the communities where they operate. There has been increasing public and scholarly attention on the emergence and presence of large international NGOs in Africa. Since the 1970s and 1980s, as neo-liberal reforms imposed by the IMF and World Bank altered the political and economic landscape in Africa, many responsibilities of the state to provide education, health and other social services became privatized or delegated to international NGOs. Large international NGOs, as well as multinational organizations and private philanthropic ventures such as the Global Fund, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and many others, have today become important funding partners in state-level development projects, and in some places the international organizations have replaced the state. Beyond providing funding through state ministries and government institutions, in some cases these organizations work outside the state apparatus, either in partnership with smaller, locally based NGOs and Community Service Organizations (CSOs) at the grassroots, or on their own, with independent offices, staff and projects launched in targeted communities.

Smaller NGOs and CSOs do in many cases work in partnership with larger organizations, relying on them for funding assistance or working as middle-men to roll out the projects and find staff with the necessary language skills and other competencies. However they are radically different from larger organizations in their limited ability to influence policy decisions at national and international levels. Also they have a very different orientation and relationship in the communities where they operate. Unlike large international organizations who have a large degree of freedom to decide where to operate or which segments of the community to serve, smaller NGOs and CSOs are more accountable to the communities where they operate, as they often depend on the assistance and involvement of the local stakeholders in order to develop and implement their projects.

Because of the rapid influx of international NGOs and relief organizations in Northern Uganda between 2000 and 2010 reporting, communication and accountability for relief and development projects has been problematic and often disorganized (Government of Uganda 2006: 23, 57). Critics of the large, global NGOs, like the critics of development, are sceptical that such organizations are nothing more than by-products of an imperial capitalist structure, that perpetuate dependency and undermine lasting solutions to poverty and inequality. One of the most succinct and sceptical criticisms of NGOs and philanthropic organizations in Africa is found in Slavoj Zizek's theory on subjective violence, where one hand works to repair and solve the problems that have been created by the other hand (2008: 16). In the case of the continued extraction of wealth and resources off the continent by western-based corporations, and the unequal playing field of global capitalism, Zizek critiques the efforts of Bill Gates,

George Soros and others, who pursue a market-oriented approach to fighting poverty, illness and inequality globally.

Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) have largely come into their own in the past 30 years globally, with the largest wielding massive budgets for operations that surpass the national budgets of some of the countries where they operate. Their increasing presence and influence in global bodies such as the United Nations and World Bank, has allowed NGOs to gain a privileged reputation as more cost effective, responsible and accountable tools to fight poverty than nation states (De Waal 1997: 633). Despite what the name suggests, these largest organizations often receive funding from the foreign countries where they are headquartered, and especially in Africa, they play an increasing role as providers of social and welfare services. The rise of NGOs to this position occurred during the rise of neo-liberal and structural reforms, as development failures were blamed on corrupt or inefficient states, and top down development came under attack. In many ways the role of NGOs as the solution for poverty, and to overcome the mistakes of earlier development efforts, has been embraced by both the powerful organizations like the UN and World Bank, as well as their critics (De Waal 2008, 1997, 1993; Holmen 2009).

Just like the media, NGOs have drawn critical attention from scholars and civil society groups based in African and other developing nations for their use of images of suffering and inferiority as tools for 'compassion usury' that expose donors in western nations to 'development pornography' (Quist-Adade & van Wyk 2007; Manji & O'Coill 2002; De Waal 1993). Quist-Adade and van Wyk challenge that NGOs export hegemonic ideology and solutions from the west to maintain global inequality (2007:78), similar to how the media and corporations have worked to "sell" the world on American / Western consumer values. These authors note how NGOs have become a growth industry for elite and wealthy in western countries (2007: 80) more than a solution for poverty or inequality. For Manji and O'Coill, NGOs are simply a continuation of earlier missionary and civilizing missions on the African continent, that have done more to "undermine the struggles of African people to emancipate themselves from economic, social and political oppression" than they have to alleviate poverty (Manji & O'Coill 2002: 568). That NGOs have taken any interest at all in the African continent according to these authors was a decision of economic imperative more than a decision based on empathy, a desire for real change or any interest in Africans and their problems (Manji and O'Coill 2002: 571). Such critiques, of exploitation and the preservation of western hegemony, and self-interest connect closely to decolonial arguments that the tools of imperialism include brainwashing Africans that they need to be saved as a

means to justify and obscure their economic exploitation (Fanon 2008, 2004; Nkrumah 1968; Thiong'o 1988; Ndlovu-Gasheni 2013). While large NGOs can, and do, play many important roles as watchdogs and whistle blowers against the nation-state and powerful corporations (Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Green Peace among others), within the contexts of humanitarian relief and development, the roles for such organizations on the African continent are more complicated and problematic.

The connections between the NGO sector and the media run deep, and have been considered by many scholars (Allen and Seaton 1999; Leopold 2005, 1999; Edmondson 2005). *The Emotion and the Truth: Studies in Mass Communication and Conflict* edited by Aguirre and Ferrandiz (2002) includes chapters from several different authors on these connections and the complexity of their relationships and co-dependency. One author, Ladislas Bizimana writes that academics, media outlets and NGOs have a relationship of mutual dependence to feed each other information and to raise public awareness in order to secure funding and donations for NGOs and to generate sensational headlines for media outlets (2002: 92). Often NGOs are better able to provide the sound-bites and gripping images of suffering and war that media outlets favour over the more nuanced and complex arguments and explanations by academics.

In his op-ed piece, *Not Enough Flies for the Right Effect*, Rotmi Sankore identifies the short-comings of the media and international NGOs reports that are unwittingly blind to how they exploit through the images they disseminate and how they contribute to continued prejudices by ignoring the thousands of African activists, health care personnel and others who are leading change and improvements on the continent (Sankore 2006: 36). As international NGOs compete with each other to use shocking images that normalize poverty and disease in the developing world in order to outrage western audiences and solicit donations (2006: 37), they are silencing and hiding the alternative practices and the achievement of success. Sankore's commentary that such reports and images fail to tell a complete story, ignoring a larger history and relying on offensive stereotypes, strongly resonates and connects to the current situation in Gulu. Sankore calls for a reversal of these institutional imbalances to combat exploitation and to allow people greater freedom and voice to define their futures and their realities. I agree strongly with Sankore that the unintended consequences of 'development pornography' need to be further studied, sand questions must be raised about privileged voices (2006: 37): who is granted the authority to create and disseminate representations and who is excluded or silenced?

Alex De Waal, Jonathon Benthall and Firoze Manji, are some of the most vocal critical scholars who have written about the choices made by NGOs in whether to adopt a more philanthropic discourse,

concerned with alleviating the suffering and appealing for compassion and empathy, or to adopt a more politically-oriented discourse about international human rights protections and norms. In his article "Not Philanthropy but Rights: The proper politicization of humanitarian philosophy" legal scholar Hugo Slim cites these authors and others as he describes why philanthropy has dominated the discourse of many NGOs and the United Nations, which until recently was largely separated and isolated from any political discussion of legal rights and norms (Slim 2002). While Slim's article focuses upon humanitarian intervention and emergency relief, the ramifications and critiques he offers against the simplistic and emotionally-driven discourse of NGOs applies to larger debates and discussions about the marginalization of Africa in their approaches and campaigns. Quoting Manji he writes "the predominance of a charitably and scientific ethic devoid of political vision saw the effective 'de-politicization of poverty' in Africa." (Slim 2002: 5). As Manji writes with O'Coill, NGOs and development were never framed in a language of emancipation, justice or rights, but rather instead used a vocabulary of charity that only perpetuated racist ideologies of the past and to identify how non-Western people needed to be corrected (Manji & O'Coill 2002: 573).

This critique of the choices made by NGOs and how they become complicit in the failure to address the root causes of conflict, poverty and other social problems in Africa connects closely to the arguments of influential French author Jean- Francois Bayart. Bayart has been writing about the political situation in Africa, and the complicity of Western nations for decades. He writes:

> "In reality, the problem for Europeans is of a philosophical and cultural nature. Europeans still have great difficulty in seeing in African countries like any others: they show 'little appreciation of the fact that they are ordinary'...They relegate Africa to the classic categories of barbarism or to the Newspeak of 'development', 'the elimination of poverty' or 'humanitarian aid'" (Bayart 2004: 458).

Bayart and Slim's cautionary critiques of how NGOs present a partial picture, and chose a particular script and foundation for their appeals closely connects to how the civil war in Northern Uganda was reported and "sold" to the outside world. In her Ph.D. thesis Ayesha Nibbe explored and described the contradictions between the exported narrative of the civil war in Northern Uganda as presented by NGOs and the media, which differ radically from the experiences and narratives on the ground in Gulu (2010: 21). The images of irrational violence and suffering

employed, and the attention to child soldiers and night commuters, connect to a larger underlying narrative of African negativity, inability and insecurity (2010: 23). In her analysis of the influence of economic and market imperatives in the humanitarian aid industry, the "business of giving gifts" relies on the narratives built upon images of starving women and children; these become the commodities that relief organizations "sell" (2010: 24). These images and narratives perpetuate the ideologies of dependence and marginality both on and off the continent. In challenging the neutrality and apolitical status of humanitarian aid, Nibbe argues that the popular media, international NGOs and the Acholi diaspora framed attention to, and understanding of the war in a non-political language. This choice to focus attention on the suffering and instability of life in the camps and the irrationality of the LRA masked and concealed the problems of governance and abuses by the Ugandan military during the conflict (2010: 177).

Other academic studies in Gulu during the conflict (Finnstromm 2008, Dolan 2009, Branch 2009) recognized the political complexity and historical context of the war, however the NGOs and media instead offered little more than emotionally driven, partial and fragmented accounts. Years after the conflict has ended in Gulu, it is still such dramatized media and NGO reports that resonate in the popular conscious both inside and outside of Uganda. These simplistic, emotionally driven messages are perhaps best demonstrated recently by the U.S.-based organization Invisible Children, in their social media campaign, Kony 2012. This video campaign, which was viewed by millions online, did little to explore or explain the complexity of the civil war in Northern Uganda, and instead used out-dated images of war and irrationality, including abductions, child soldiers and night commuters, as commodities to captivate and entice donors. This short coming of Invisible Children's approach, and their videos specifically, are not new, and have been written about by many authors (Branch 2012, Finnstromm 2012, Schulties 2008).

Academic scholarship has gone further to consider the context and complexities of the conflict in Gulu, as well as the different agents involved, including NGOs and the media, however there is still a need for greater scholarly attention to Northern Uganda, the conflict and the current post conflict reality. The role of NGOs, their interactions with the community and the government, are one of many topics that I find needs greater attention. One of the challenges and limitations in current scholarship on NGOs in Africa is the problem of blurred divisions and ambiguities. Just as the NGO label is ambiguous, humanitarian relief for emergencies and disasters is also a blurred term, as several of the organizations that once provided such relief in Gulu have shifted to development projects that seek to provide longer

term social and economic supports after the end of the war and the dismantling of the camps. Many international NGOs use conflicts or famine in Africa to grab public attention, but often the relief projects do not address the root causes, and as conflicts end these organizations transition from relief work to community development in order to continue to "sell" their brand and activities to foreign donors. Such ambiguities of intentions and project duration takes shape in the comments offered by Philip, a friend of mine. Philip, who works closely with youth organizations, shared with me his opinions of NGOs in Gulu and the unfulfilled expectations of many in the community. His disappointment that so many organizations briefly appeared only to move on after the war to the next conflict site highlights the challenges to identifying clear roles for NGOs, whether they are engaged in short term relief or projects with longer duration.

> This is the time for them to play their role. Now there is peace, donors can change the lives of a community, but during the war... what could you don't do? Anything? You can't change lives when people are living in camps and can't be empowered. Now that there is peace this is the time for NGOs because we have the fertile ground. People are ready for development. We have a very big need for peer counselling amongst the youth. Many young people are traumatized and there is very high rates of suicide amongst the youth (sic). There is a need for consultation and using a bottom up approach to work with our communities. Projects need to focus on sustainability because the donors won't stay forever, so there is need for self-sustainability. NGOs only look for war and relief. They forget about psycho-social support, and that is a challenge that remains after the war. I can understand that NGOs follow the war: to Karamoja, to DRC and Sudan. They go where the hot war is, and leave the other places in peace, to forget. The NGOs came here because there is war. They need it to survive. [Philip 22/10/2013]

Philip voices the frustration that NGOs are more concerned with their donors and narratives of violence to raise money that is shared by many in Gulu. It is interesting to hear about the alternative ideas of accountability and transparency from people in Gulu, who believe that a large amount of money was donated to help them, but very little has reached to the community. Philip's frustration stems from the international focus on relief as opposed to some of alternative approaches being used by local

organizations that focus on liberation and self-help. As Philip says “the donors won't stay forever” thus it is important “that communities are able to stand on their own and to create their own solutions”. While critical attention to large international NGOs is important within the social sciences such as Anthropology, such a limited focus should not hide or mask how small, community-driven NGOs and other organizations do create solutions at the grassroots and encourage autonomy and self-reliance. It is also important that such a different perspective about the role of NGOs, exploitation and unfulfilled expectations are read more widely by those who influence policy or work directly in development projects on the ground.

The critiques of NGOs that parallel and connect to the critiques of the media, that they sensationalize and seek to sell a product, rather than improve the world, appear to be a growing area of research, one that according to De Waal and others are extremely important given their increasing presence and influence in Africa and other regions that have been cast as 'Other'. The close connections between the tools used by the media and NGOs to shock audiences and grab public attention is articulated well be De Waal “the formula for television representation of African crises, with the foreign aid worker playing the role of saviour, remains both powerful and common (1997: 637). Part of the power that NGOs wield, beyond their increasing power to influence governments at home and abroad, either through grabbing the public attention and shaming western governments for failures overseas, or their influence on policy in those countries who have increasingly come to depend on foreign aid. Beyond the problem of governments in Africa, Asia or Latin America who become more accountable to foreign donors than their own citizenry (De Waal 1997: 628) there is a problem of scale and who gets to tell the story. As De Waal writes in a more recent article in the Journal of Human Rights, the influence of decolonization in Africa on the civil rights movement in the USA or the liberation of African countries led by teachers, trade unions, lawyers and students from European rule has been largely forgotten because NGOs and the media have both followed a similar script to write Africa in terms of what it lacks or what it is failing to do (De Waal 2010). Instead of allowing the projects lead by African organizations, or those in which they partner with foreign organizations to be silenced or ignored because of the mobility and access to media outlets enjoyed by the largest, and wealthiest NGOs it is important to consider how both large and small actors bring a variety of resources and weaknesses to bare in their development approaches, orientation and objectives.

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The often competitive and problematic interactions between small, local organizations and larger international organizations are known and recognized within Uganda. In its 2006 policy paper, *Issues Paper on the Development of a Conflict Resolution and Peace Building Policy,* written by the Northern Uganda Peace Initiative (NUPI), the challenges of complex and multi-layered interactions between the government, international NGOs and smaller local NGOs or CSOs (Community Service Organizations) are noted as being one of the many causes for so much failure to bring peace and development to Northern Uganda. The report, commissioned by the government of Uganda, defines NGOs as large international organizations, not affiliated with governments or the private sector (NUPI 2006:26). NGOs are divided from Community Service Organizations (CSOs) which are local entities, organizations and networks, composed of people, that lay outside the formal state apparatus and are generally more local national in scope. However such a division ignores the hundreds of NGOs that are founded and registered in Uganda, and directed by Ugandans. One of the obstacles to achieving peace in the north noted in the report is that there are problems of networking and coordination between NGOs, CSOs and government institutions because the roles of each aren't clearly defined and that the duplication of efforts and the conflicting approaches where different actors don't share the same objectives and perspectives (NUPI 2006:23, 57).

There is a perception of inequalities in power and agency between the international and the local that has led to a mind-set that one friend expressed to me:

> "If you form a CBO (Community Based Organization) no one expects you to be there next year. NGOs have big budgets from abroad and work with CBOs to accomplish their objectives. If a CBO doesn't get any big funders (sic) it will die". [Walter 01/09/2012]

Such a comment not only perpetuates the power inequalities between international and local organizations, it also ignores how local organizations are a necessary intermediary between communities on the ground and international donors. The low expectations for African-based organizations are shared by some academic studies that "not much seems to be expected from them" (Holmen 2010:19 citing Carroll 1992 and Holmen and Jirstrom 1996). Like Holmen's findings, the 2006 report by the Northern Uganda Peace Initiative shares this concern, that recovery and development projects are not

empowering the communities, but instead "dependency on relief has eroded the confidence and dignity of the people, often leading to apathy and alcoholism" (NUPI 2006: 83).

An internalized inferiority among some people in Gulu, that solutions and money can only come from outside, and that local communities are unable to generate their own funding or achieve long term impacts, is a leading factor in many of the social problems that remain after the war. However, from my own time in the field, I disagree with such an opinion, and find that it silences and ignores some of the most interesting questions about partnership, negotiation, and ownership. Rather than looking at how local NGOs and organizations lack power, or are being co-opted and directed by foreign donors and priorities, it is also important to consider how these organizations are pursuing liberation, that moves beyond a limited scope of analysis only attuned to liberalization.

The challenges to recognize and navigate the many blurred divides and scales between nation-states, international NGOs, African NGOs, and other types of local groups is important, especially in considering whether NGO practices are resisting power or supporting it. In his extensive ethnography in East Africa *Snakes in Paradise* (2009), anthropologist Hans Holmen goes further than many other NGO studies and critics to recognize and include smaller, locally based NGOs. As Holmen recognizes, indigenous organizations can play an important role, though they can also be hampered in their efforts because of the increasingly bureaucratic and institutional demands by foreign donors, and competition between indigenous organizations, state programs and international NGOs (2009:83, 218). Many academic and international policy texts have failed to consider the role or alternative practices and orientation of nationally-based NGOs within countries such as Uganda. Rather than to write these actors off as little more than "middle men or compradors" in the role out of western development (2009: 19) it is important to also consider these organizations with attention to their subjectivity, and to include them in debates about how NGOs are structured and the role they play.

The relationship between different actors in development and relief in Uganda is complex and problematic, and a rich site for further study. It is important that all the actors involved are considered in future studies, and that the alternative practices and ideologies of the smaller ones are not dominated by western theories and expectations. The connections and divisions between large international NGOs, smaller local NGOs and other types of community organizations need to be explored further, and have important policy implications in Uganda and other countries. While Holmen's text does a good job to investigate locally based NGOs in East Africa, the conclusions he presents I find still limiting and fails to consider how such organizations are very much alternatives, in both their practice and objectives.

The challenge of writing about Africa and finding appropriate levels and scales are recurrent in the work of many foreign experts. In *Global Shadows* (2006) eminent African Anthropologist James Ferguson offers a particular vision and view of development and Africa's changing, and unchanging, place in a global world. Similar to his collaborative article with Akhil Gupta (Ferguson and Gupta 2002), much of Ferguson's work has tended to look at globalization, the state, and market capitalism at larger, more abstract levels. This critique of Ferguson's work is found in Tania Li's (1996) consideration of Ferguson's earlier text *The Anti-Politics Machine* (1990). Li offers a nuanced response about scale and the actual practice of development beyond the theoretical and meta-levels of Ferguson's work. Her work is a valuable reminder that community is not an abstract or meta-level concept, but one that is firmly rooted in the local and in daily practices (Li 1996: 510). I find Li's work very compelling, particularly her call for scholarship to re-engage with real-world problems, and also her recognition that micro-level ethnographic research is necessary to discover answers and new questions worth asking (1996: 522). Li writes "Divergent images of community result not from inadequate knowledge or confusion of purpose, but from the location of discourse and action in the context of specific struggles and dilemmas" (1996: 523). Li's response to Ferguson is very useful for analysis of the NGO industry in Gulu, given the multi-layered nature of development funding and objectives, and importantly her call to situate and locate development, NGOs and their practices. We will return to Li and considerations of the differing concepts of community in the next chapter, but her comment on the location of discourse needs to be considered further before digging into the micro-level ethnographic data at Sports Outreach Ministry (SOM) in Gulu.

One of the challenges that small NGOs on the ground, like SOM, face that needs to be acknowledged is their limited position in terms of options. While it may be possible for academics or other privileged elites in distant offices and ivory towers to write of a need to resist and contest the imposition of capitalist values and market structures, or their combining Evangelical Christian practices with development, for a small organization like SOM the luxury of such a position is not possible. Instead they have embraced an alternative orientation and ethos, one that recognizes the position of relative powerlessness and poverty amongst the community where they work. Perhaps this makes them complicit in the expansion and influence of capitalist ideology and development, mixing religious ethics and ideology in ways not dissimilar to Max Weber's famous text *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930). But a closer look at the objectives and practices at SOM can also be analyzed in light of a lack of alternatives, and according to an alternative frame of reference. SOM does not have

the power to stand fast in the face of rapid economic changes after the war in Northern Uganda, instead it must work within such a reality. Instead of imposing Protestant values of capital accumulation as argued by Weber, such values can be understood as survival strategies and, interestingly, are employed as tools to build community rather than erase or abandon it.

It is with these considerations, of their limitations and in a quest for alternatives ways to understand the work at SOM that what is discovered there is linked more closely to Fanon and ideas of liberation than to market capitalism and to liberalization. Based on my experiences and field research at SOM, I disagree with Holmen in his study of NGOs in Africa when he notes that NGOs have largely failed to achieve the changes that were once projected to bring radical changes, and that instead they have tended to replicate capitalist market strategies and the dominant ideologies of development and community among others (2010: 9). Such a characterization does not fit comfortably with the model and approach at SOM. While international NGOs may have failed to create new paradigms and alternatives for development, and have replicated global power structures and undermine African self-help (Holmen 2010: 226), it is important that we turn our attention to locally situated and locally directed NGOs who have followed Fanon in embracing bread and land as solutions, and have aligned themselves with their community instead of with the powerful and the elite (Fanon 2004: 9).

Sports Outreach Ministry (SOM)

SOM was founded by a group of Evangelical Christian pastors in 2005, with a mission to train and empower young Christian leaders and to provide psycho-social (trauma) counselling and to provide support and training for "livelihood"[12] projects. Despite the insecurity of the civil war, the branch in Northern Uganda first opened Gulu in 2005 and by 2008 had acquired land for farming in Koro sub-county, a few kilometres outside of Gulu municipality. Today those first steps have culminated in a demonstration farm in the parish of Koro Abili, the opening of a small nursery school and medical clinic, and the construction of two football pitches and a church. Since 2011 they have expanded to open three small "satellite offices[13]" in the villages of Lagutu, Pagwini and Lajwotek.

SOM engages in many different development activities: trainings for crops and livestock, providing basic medical services, helping children and youth with education through their nursery

[12] In Gulu 'livelihood' has become a popular label for numerous types of development, especially those focused around agriculture and income generating activities.

[13] As named within the organization (local term) for smaller, regional offices in rural areas

schools and school scholarships for older students, and a "family strengthening" program which distributes livestock. As a faith-based organization, SOM embraces a Christian philosophy and uses Bible teachings to guide their orientation, activities and identity. The organization is divided in two halves, separating community development activities from their church ministry, each having separate budgets and staff with the exception of the Director who is both the head pastor and the overall project manager. Their community development activities encompass the education, farm and medical services, while the church and ministry activities include counselling and psycho-social support, song and dance, MDD[14], prayer retreats and crusades, and other activities both inside Koro sub-county and to other communities in the north.

SOM partners with numerous international religious organizations, such as Sports Outreach Institute[15], Care Corps[16] and Joni and Friends[17], and has close connections to many churches in the United States. These international partners provide much of the material donations distributed through outreach activities, such as sports equipment, wheel chairs and medical supplies. SOM use both international and Ugandan partners, the majority of which are religious organizations or individuals, to raise funding for their community development and church activities, but is working to become self-reliant and generate their own funding. The farm is the targeted source to generate money through commercial agriculture. Currently the maize (corn), soybean and other crops grown are used in the feeding programs in the nursery schools, and to feed the youth, who do farm work during their holidays, and the staff. The intention is to increase the crop yield, and grow non-traditional products such as coffee and citrus, which can be sold, and to add more dairy cows and chickens so they can sell the excess milk and eggs beyond what is consumed within the organization.

The success stories at SOM are many to observe: seeing children and adults carefully fitted in their first wheel chairs with assistance from a medical volunteer team from the USA, visiting families

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[14] Music Dance and Drama. Typically these activities are used together as tools to educate, sensitize and open discussions around topics that are often little discussed such as domestic abuse, HIV/AIDS transmission and stigma, and the rights of women and children.

[15] Sports Outreach Institute was described to me as the Mother of SOM, and provides financial support, training and other resources. Though SOM is independent and autonomous, the full details of their relationship remain unclear to me. http://sportsoutreach.net/where-we-serve/gulu-uganda/

[16] Care Corps International - An American based Christian organization that has been working with SOM staff for many years to organize annual trauma camps for youth in Gulu http://www.carecorps.org/

[17] Joni and Friends partner with SOM on wheel chair and walking aid distributions in Uganda as part of their Wheels for the World. In August 2013, the third year of the partnership, over 160 wheel chairs were distributed. http://www.joniandfriends.org/wheels-for-the-world/

who had been given a pair of goats or pigs to raise as a means of income generation to pay school fees and improve nutrition at home, and hearing the testimonies about how SOM had brought hope and faith, and confidence into their lives from the youth on the farm. For the youth, the farm is a site for leisure, to play sports, and to flirt and joke with friends, and to learn practical skills and strategies in farming methods for mixed planting, irrigation, and how to grow non-traditional crops found in the southern parts of the country but rare in the north. They also gain hands on practice caring and feeding the livestock. The farm is an escape, from both "idle time" and the negative influences of such as alcohol abuse and early pregnancy, which are prevalent in Koro.

SOM's scholarship program is connected to the farm, where the hard work and regular attendance of the youth during their holidays, allows them, especially the girls, to earn money which may not otherwise be available. The money allows them to pay their school fees and complete primary and secondary schooling, as well as to buy their school requirements such as reams of paper, cleaning supplies, and foodstuffs which students must bring at the start of each academic term. For many youth and adults alike in Koro, the war and life in the camps interrupted and delayed education for many, thus it is not uncommon for boys and girls who are 15 years and older to still be completing their primary levels of schooling.

Sports Outreach started with a mission to reach out to youth through sport and scripture, and as the centre has grown particular attention to youth has been maintained. While farm work takes much of the morning hours during their holidays, the afternoons offer more freedom and leisure, with chess classes, and sports matches and training in football and volleyball. SOM uses sports as a platform to recruit and engage youth and the wider community.

In 2012 SOM formed an joint youth and adult football league in Gulu municipality which encourages social responsibility and a spirit for volunteerism beyond athletic competition. The league gets people engaged in community work cleaning roads, helping widows and orphans to prepare and plant their fields and other socially conscious activities. Such community engagement and conscious citizenry is in high demand after the war. Koro sub-county has been recognized in the Ugandan media as having one of the highest concentrations of alcohol and substance abuse in the north (Mugado 2011), and the increasing rates of youth suicide, HIV/AIDS infection and teenage pregnancy are symptoms of the social breakdowns and fractures within the communities that remain after the war (Kidega 2012). Though SOM takes a recognizably Christian approach to engage the youth and surrounding community on these topics and discussions, it should be noted that this is not at all uncommon in Uganda, where

Christian Religious Education (CRE) is a core subject in primary and secondary schools for both public and private institutions, with the exception of Islamic schools where teaching of Christian doctrine is substituted by teachings in the Muslim faith.

The youngest children at SOM attend nursery school at the Mango Tree Daycare in a large, open air classroom. Over 80 children attend at the nursery school on the farm in Koro Abili, and through the nursery schools in its three smaller, satellite offices, SOM helps over 400 young children get their start in formal schooling, free of charge. As Judith states in her quote to open the chapter, the nursery school is used as a tool to integrate and build rapport with the surrounding community. SOM recognizes the challenges of building a strong relationship and trust with their surrounding community. It is these relationships built over time that invite people into their church and meet the demands in rural communities for greater accessibility to social service resources like education and health. The relationships that have developed out of the first steps taken in 2008 by opening the farm, the nursery school and their church ministry in Koro Abili, are easy to see when the families of children, parents and/or grandparents attend the Sunday church services, with many of the children wearing their school uniform and greeting their teachers and the other staff members. Monday to Friday the community connections and the strength of the relationships built are also visible in the frequent visits by the youth, who now in primary and secondary school, drop in to visit farm to say hello, check in with their mentors, and find out about the upcoming sports tournaments, care camps or other activities.

The many development activities and projects at SOM reflect the multiple and varied needs of the area in which they operate. While SOM often has to make difficult decisions because of their limited resources, they also are forced to rely on their beneficiaries and the surrounding community in order to achieve their many successes. For example when SOM distributes pigs to a family through its family strengthening program, it expects the family will help them grown and continue this distribution by giving half of the first two litters of baby pigs born to be re-distributed to other families. SOM provides an incentive for these families by first helping these families to construct their pig-pens ("piggeries") and also by following up with new born pigs for veterinary care and to provide immunizations against common viruses that can kill baby pigs. This dynamic and balanced relationship goes far beyond a simple relationship of "gift-giving" to one of mutual dependence and co-operative action.

Similarly SOM uses its youth members, and football players as well as its church congregation to accomplish community outreach activities. Though I didn't get a chance to participate in such activities

I have heard many accounts from Ugandans and internationals of their monthly Friday activities in the dry season when they may construct a road to an isolated home or village, or assist an elderly person by ploughing their fields with hand hoes, so that when the rains arrive this person will be able to plant something in the garden. In this way SOM encourages its community to engage in Christian acts of kindness that promote a mind-set of volunteerism and civic duty to fellow community members.

SOM is able to achieve these deeper relationships because of its close connection to the people with whom they work and the long, and multi-layered projects they undertake. In this approach SOM is much closer to Fanon's call for intellectuals (which I extend to development workers) to join the people and work to produce and mobilize basic resources like bread and land, rather than political power or individual riches (Fanon 2004: 11). Unlike the approach of many larger scale NGOs, with large budgets but scarce time for relationship building SOM has reversed the equation. This allows them to achieve greater successes and accomplishments because both SOM and the beneficiaries share in the understanding that the relationship will be long lasting, and not a one-off donation. The beneficiaries also wield a much larger degree of autonomy and influence in project planning and the decisions of how to allocate resources because of their close relationships with the SOM administration, and the office which is housed within a walkable distance. Rather than barriers of complicated language and foreign, abstract expertise, SOM's staff have become experts as farmers and working with the community to design collaborative projects where feedback from the beneficiaries is both solicited and necessary. Though SOM does suffer from its own challenges, and there are community members who feel it should go further in its openness and inclusion, its orientation amongst and within the people connect closely with Fanon's call for unity and humility to achieve liberation. a

For the international organizations that partner with SOM to provide counselling camps, distribute medical and other supplies or to identify possible beneficiaries, SOM's close relationship is invaluable, as it save them a huge amount of time and limits the problems that may be encountered on the ground. This position as a go-between with foreign missionary, medical or counselling teams and the host community is able to maximize the impacts for both ends. In this way SOM challenges or reverses any idea of foreign experts, where instead SOM is the expert for both the foreign visitors, as their guide, translator and program manager, that relies upon, and works alongside the host community, to identify where the needs are greatest and how the resources can most appropriately be used. In my own case, beyond my interest to work with SOM on building a website or recording video footage to raise the organizations profile and funding base, it was the administration who helped me to develop a

plan to share some of my skills, providing computer training to the youth and some of their year-round volunteers.

Computer training- tools for communication

Probably the most personally rewarding activity during my internship was doing computer training with the youth members and some of the organizations other volunteers. This was an early step in an ongoing project in which SOM, CVAP, I and other stakeholders have agreed to continue working. Computers are slowly being integrated into school curriculum in Uganda, but access is still very limited. With consultation and supervision by SOM administrators, we organized to make five laptops available for basic computer classes during the three weeks of school holiday in August and early September when many youth would be at the farm. For several of the youth it was their first time being able to sit at a computer. My memories of those afternoon sessions are filled with their dark eyes glued to the screens, their reluctance to shut down the machines at the end of the session, their requests for a few more minutes to practice just a little longer.

The five laptops we used were connected using a seeming birds-nest of inter-crossing wires and an extension cable that ran out the window to a generator, which provides the only source of electricity on the farm at the moment. Over 30 students squeezed themselves on to narrow benches each day in front of a computer, enduring the often stifling heat inside the church. The more experienced students positioned themselves directly in front of the machines and would only surrender their place only upon instruction, eager to demonstrate to their friends how to type, highlight text on the screen, and showing off by changing the colour, font or adding effects in Microsoft Word and other Microsoft Office programs.

Though computers and ITC[18] classes are becoming integrated slowly into the secondary school curriculum, many schools in Uganda, especially in rural areas, lack machines, and, in some cases, electricity. Such computer classes focus on theory instead of practical, hands-on exposure, to overcome their limitations. I heard stories of schools where machines are brought into the school to administer the national examinations only at the end of the year. For students attending such schools, examination day is the first opportunity to sit at a machine and apply the theory and instruction learned on a chalk board and photocopied handouts. Recognizing how students in these rural schools suffer from such scarce

[18] Information Technology and Communication. This label is used in secondary schools and at the university level.

resources, the computer centre that will be slowly built up at SOM in the years to come fills a huge demand, to provide access and practical experience.

In the coming years, SOM, CVAP and I are working towards opening a permanent computer centre at the farm in Koro that will offer regular computer classes for youth and other members of the community. In 2013 a first computer was donated, and in 2014 five to seven more machines are being added. One impediment to the process is the laws in Uganda preventing the import of second-hand computers. This legislation was passed to protect the environment and prevent the dumping of foreign e-waste, but as an unintended consequence it has made it more difficult for schools and small NGOs to procure affordable, quality computers.[19] While the law has been revised and softened from the original outright ban, the bureaucratic hurdles and requirements such as the age- limits for donated machines are barriers more easily navigated by larger international NGOs or wealthy foreign donors than by Ugandan-lead organizations.

Greater access and computer training in the community can offer a number of positive benefits. Within Canada and other countries integrating computers into classrooms and other public institutions has radically changed the education system and is opening new opportunities and industries in the wider economy. While technology will not solve all the problems in Northern Uganda, there is currently as risk that Ugandans will be left behind and will lack many of the skills to participate in global and technology markets, especially in light of the recent policies being proposed in Kenya and other East African countries to integrate computers into schools and curriculums.

Many young Ugandans have not missed the importance of ITC (Information Technology and Communication), and are enrolling in university programs, starting small businesses and writing grant proposals to bring computer access and trainings to their communities through small youth organizations and clubs. The role of technology in development plans for Africa are also gaining increasing attention from large corporations like Microsoft and Google, who are becoming more active on the continent, recognizing of the growing market and potential (Google Africa 2014; Microsoft 2014). While this up-surge in excitement over the potential for technology to transform Africa has not been missed by recent academic studies and media reports (Miall 2014; Lawino and Oketch 2014; Talbot 2013), I find there is

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[19] The legislation which passed in 2009 was to protect the environment from dumping of e-waste from wealthier foreign countries, however the outcome has not achieved environmental protection (Nakkazi 2013). The law has instead produced a black market in illegally imported used machines, and increased imports of low quality, cloned machines. According to its critics, the law has resulted in increased e-waste because so many low quality machines have been imported only to be trashed by disappointed customers (Busiku and Leacock 2010).

still many opportunities for research amongst, and collaboration with some of the African-lead organizations who are moving quickly to respond to the demand for digital and mobile computer technologies on the continent.

A letter from one of students:

4th September, 2013

To Thomas Prince:

Re: Areas I have learned & my future interest in information and computer technology

Christian greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (I) Am so privileged to have this golden chance to communicate these words inline with the above reference. Firstly, I greatly drop thanks to Sports Outreach Ministry for having given me this great chance to touch the computer that I never thought of touching. Therefore, with grand honour, here are the things I have learned:

The meaning of computer, the history of computer, the merits of computer such as storing information, calculation arithmetics (sic), working in dangerous places, repairing other devices like vehicles using computer and others that would fill up this sheet of paper. With these great discovery I would therefore like to learn more about computer like how to create emails, how to open one's website, how to send messages through email address, how to repair broken computers and other related devices, how to print typed documents, photo edition, video editions and many more as the world of computer revolves. May the good Lord really bless all the facilitators of this programme plus the work of their hands.

Thanks

Yours Sincere,

Odong Brian[20]

In Brian's letter the influence of the Christian faith can't be missed. As noted earlier, at SOM Christian values, discipleship and philosophy are the foundations and cornerstones of the organization.

[20] A pseudonym used to protect his identity

Africa has a long and complicated history with Christianity, missionaries and colonial control that can't be ignored or forgotten (Mudimbe 1998). However I am unsure whether attention on the colonial past and the complicit role of European missionaries during colonialism is a productive path towards understanding the activities of faith-based organizations like SOM in the present era. While there has been a lot of movement towards the secular separations of the Church from the state in Europe and North America, in Uganda, like many African countries, this divide is less straight forward, and in some cases non-existent. Uganda is, according to its constitution, a Christian nation. In public schools Christian Religious Education (CRE) is taught to all students. Religious morals and values play an important role in the policy and governance arenas, in the popular media and in many of the social organizations and daily practices enjoyed by many Ugandans. The role of religion as a marker of identity and the establishment of social norms and mores is visibly evident in social media posts and online conversations within the country, where people regularly reference their faith and religious scripture on Facebook, Twitter other social media websites and forums.

Attention to faith-based organizations (FBOs0 and their role in development has been relatively limited compared to the attention NGOs and development have received, though since 2005 there has been an increase in academic publications on them, especially in light of their increased funding from governments in the USA and UK (Tomalin 2012). Though the role of these organizations is increasing the considerations and discussions of religious views and identity in development are still limited, and an area for continued research. In her ethnography of World Vision and Christian Care in Zimbabwe, anthropologist Erica Bornstein reflects on the challenges of trying to understand the role of religion in development, and its exclusion or mis-reading in western theory (2003). Bornstein is not alone in her recognition of how religion and development of the exclusion of religion from development studies before the new millennium, and especially the growing presence within development activities for religious orders and organizations in Africa. In 1987 a conference was organized in Uppsala at the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies on the theme (Petersen 1987), and later in 2007 The Religions and Development Research Programme Consortium was formed between universities in the UK, India, Pakistan, Nigeria and Tanzania to consider the role of major world religions in the development and anti-poverty efforts in the four latter countries (Tomalin 2007). In 2012 the journal Development in Practice published a special issue: Religion in Development to in order to reflect on the latest directions and discussions, and bring greater attention to the connections between the topics (Radoki 2012).

The considerations of religious orientations in development and governance is especially

important in Uganda where the Anti-Homosexuality and Anti-Pornography bills have recently been passed in Parliament, both of which have close connections to religious ideologies and interpretations. Many critics of the recently passed Anti-Homosexuality Law have focused upon the influence of the 'Religious Right' in America influencing the drafting of the law and propaganda of intolerance towards sexual minorities (God loves Uganda 2013) which connect closely to earlier studies of the increasing power of Western religious orders and organizations to influence policy both at home and abroad (Halton 2007). While such critical attention and the accompanying advocacy for justice and rights are both very important, there is a risk that attention on the influence of foreign Christians subjugates and misses the roles and influence of African Christians in their own communities and polarizes discussions that limit cross cultural understanding, negotiation and exchange.

Similarly, limited and partial attention to faith-based development initiatives and organizations may be concealing, ignoring or inflating the successes and accomplishments that have been achieved (Tomalin 2012). While many decolonial writers like Mbembe (2002), and Thiong'o (1988) are suspicious of the Christian religion as an imported, Eurocentric product, and as a colonial legacy still to be overcome, as Bornstein notes in her own ethnography on faith-based NGOs in Zimbabwe, writing about religion and conversion becomes more complex when it is African missionaries seeking African converts (2003: 271).

At SOM, christian faith plays an important role in the identity and practice of the organization and development in the community. Their activities are framed through a lens of religious teachings that highlight caring for the sick and helping the poor, and for the staff, volunteers, youth and other members who embrace their religion find within it not only a destination, but also a pathway and a practice for struggle and liberation from negative elements and influences in their community. Though liberation theology as a movement was largely centred in the Catholic faith in Latin America in the mid-20th century, many aspects of the ideology are shared: to resist larger power structures and the marginality of the poor, and the separation of deliverance in the after-life from the immediate experiences in life on Earth.

The liberation that is instilled at SOM is one of self-reliance and to fight the negative effects of dependency and internalized notions of inability that remain after the war as hang-overs from humanitarian assistance and intervention. SOM is encouraging the people with whom it works, especially the youth, to plan and prepare for a future where there will be no one who will come and give money, to pay school fees, or to build houses for widows. The struggle to achieve this, as part of their

work for justice and dignity within the community, through self-discipline and hard work are the foundations for SOM's approach to overcome a dependency that has developed because of food aid and other support from foreigner organizations, among other negative effects of the civil war and poverty.

Far from working to create westernized Christian subjects, at SOM, like in many churches in Uganda, the teachings and preaching highlight how the west has lost its way in terms of religious orientation and where people have become lazy and indulgent. Whether there is any truth to such claims or not, I don't find them the interesting discussions to pursue. Instead from my own experiences in Uganda, where I attend church much more regularly than in Canada, and my internship at SOM, I find there is a great opportunity for religious parishioners and secular scholars, students, and development workers alike, to learn from each other, and to reflect on their own experiences and beliefs. While many Western academics may take a secular and sceptical approach to religion, for many in Uganda, whether academics or not, religion is embraced and is a cornerstone for their identity and community cohesion. Rather than letting such different views or orientations block understanding or opportunities for exchange, I think they can also be avenues for productive and creative exchange and understanding.

In fact religious organizations may have realized a much greater success in achieving development and recovery after the war than secular NGOs and foreign governments. In part, I find this is built on ideas of a shared community and shared investment for development projects led by religious organizations. As opposed to the preservation of inequalities of power and access that unfortunately characterize many activities of larger, international NGOs, and their mixed motives that are as noted in the first half of this chapter, the religious approach of sharing and compassion may offer valuable insights and suggestions how larger, corporatized development can improve.

Following Bornstein (2003) and others, I find the terrain of religious orders and faith-based community development to be a very rich area that needs more attention. Such studies can offer new views and alternative understandings to development that move beyond only economic or political metrics. Also such alternatives offer practices and raise questions that necessitate a re-consideration of some of the characterizations and criticisms of NGOs and development. At SOM there is a much closer orientation to Fanon's writings on bread and land to orient development and engagement, and and a rejection of the complicity of “colonized” elites who re-create inequality and chase individual wealth and power at the expense of the larger citizenry within former colonial nations (2004). Such an approach towards liberation goes far beyond political independence, and through such an approach it may be possible to find ways to think around and theorize beyond the negativity that has for too long

stereotyped Africa.

While using Fanon's work, who is recognized more as a secular humanist in part because of his close association with Sartre, to connect to an Evangelical and religiously-guided organization like SOM is in some ways problematic, I find that a Fanonian theory of liberation speaks much more directly and appropriately to SOM's values and philosophies than liberalism can. Liberalism is also a secular in nature, so both frameworks offer hurdles and round corners that don't align well with one another at some angles. However as the recent attention to faith-based organizations in development has noted, these organizations may go further to address issues of empowerment and dependency better than secular NGOs or corporate philanthropic organizations (James 2012). While there are many activities that both secular and religious organizations pursue in their anti-poverty work, in terms of discussions of rights and political inclusion it is the religious organizations, who in contrast to their many other socially conservative alignments, are far more radical and critical of inequalities in wealth and power, and avoid some of the paternalistic risks of development aid. Rather than a charitable gift from wealthy donors, what support the members at SOM receive is framed as earned and deserved, coming from beyond the world of humans, and that it is hard work and dedication that brings the rewards in this life and the next.

Speaking from the Shadows: Sharing voice, authority and expertise

One of the strengths of ethnographic methods is the inclusion of voices and alternative knowledge of communities and experts outside of academia and outside the centres of power. For research that seeks to move into the shadows, or to consider the small scale practices and organizations missed by other research tools, ethnographic methods of data collection such as focus groups, interviews and participant observation all help an outside researcher to gain a glimpse into local understandings and context specific knowledge and to share them with those who haven't been able to take such a glimpse themselves. Ethnography offers opportunities to blur the lines between researchers and collaborators, and a chance for new voices to challenge and speak back and challenge Eurocentric domination of voice, authority and audience.

I have long had a passion for applied anthropology and community engagement thus ways to move my research beyond the university context of data collection, and to include my research participants was an objective from the outset. One step towards accomplishing this was to organize a small workshop where the research could be shared amongst the community where it was collected. This event allowed for discussions and exchanges of ideas between different savings and loan groups, small organizations and other invited guests to share their voices and to re-centre the research and its outcomes within Koro sub-county. As I have noted earlier, there has been a lot written about Gulu by outsiders, but instead of foreign "experts" writing about Gulu for foreign audiences, I present an alternative: situated knowledge shared within the local community. The people who generously contributed and shared their opinions and insights I position as local experts, by virtue of their engagement and experience, in contrast to expertise recognized according to global media outlets or professional and academic qualifications.

NGOs and academics are not the only ones who speak on behalf of others, nor the only ones encouraged to do so. Celebrities have also played a role in speaking on behalf of distant places and peoples, particularly in Africa, drawing attention to injustices and the ravages of poverty and violence on the continent. Two of the most well-known and out-spoken global defenders of Africa from the UK have been Bob Geldorf and Bono. Both men have been recognized by the World Bank President, Paul Wolfowitz for their 'global humanitarianism', and nominated multiple times for the Nobel Peace Prize (Yrjola 2009). Geldorf, referring to himself as Mr. Africa, was a leading organizer of the Band Aid (1985) and of Live Aid (2005) concerts, and Bono having used his celebrity brand to launch numerous

endeavours to aid Africa such as the RED campaign and EDUN. Despite the media's fanfare and adoration, this use of their fame and celebrity status to bring attention to Africa is highly problematic because of how it silences and subjugates Africans to positions of passive victims and draws upon out dated narratives of salvation for Africa. Riina Yrjola's 2005 article *The Invisible Violence of Celebrity Humanitarianism* does an excellent job to critically unpack many of the problems of their approach and challenges how much these celebrities do to help the continent.

In his study of the End Poverty Now movement, Harrison's quote by Bono is also telling: "I represent a lot of [African] people who have no voice at all... They haven't asked me to represent them. It's clearly cheeky but I hope they're glad I do" (2010: 404). Rather than maintaining the silence of African voices by only listening to celebrities, development expert, or NGOs, ethnography offers a chance to include them. If the critiques are valid that celebrities and NGOs who "speak" on behalf of silenced others, providing media sound-bites more than information, understanding or empathy, are complicit in the continued marginalization and alterity of Africa (Yrjola 2009), than perhaps ethnographic studies and the sharing of local voices and knowledges can challenge and overcome marginality and alterity.

Instead of speaking about Africa to audiences outside the continent, it is important also to engage in discussion and exchange with communities situated on the continent. Why is it Bono chooses to talk to Europeans and Americans to inform them about Africa instead of speaking with communities in Gulu or other places in Africa? Not only is a great deal of knowledge and wisdom available when we listen to African voices, more importantly it re-orients the power and agency to solve Africa's problems. Contrasting the emotional appeals used by charities that suggest that western donors and dollars can solve the continents problems, African voices and expertise offer a deeper, contextualized understanding and present an alternative discourse on concepts of achievement and ownership. The success stories, and the challenges yet to overcome in Gulu, are best understood by the people who create and own them. Just as members learn from each another at VSLA meetings, the workshop was an opportunity for reflection, to build new friendships and networks and to share advice of how to achieve success.

Within postcolonial studies moving away from Eurocentric authority and power have become a global phenomena in Latin America, Asia and Africa (Escobar 1995, 2006; Wallerstein 1994; Giri 1998; Mbembe 2004, 2002; Comaroff 2012). Playwright, novelist and theorist Ngugi wa Thiong'o from Kenya has been a vocal and recognized advocate for African voices and African audiences. His text *Moving the Centre* (1993) reflects his own efforts to move beyond limitations and European influence

and frames of reference, as a public speaker, writer and university professor. Thiong'o's work with African writing as a counter-discourse, and his attention to achieving liberation in *Decolonizing the Mind* (1988), build upon and re-iterate Fanon's calls for liberation and the reclamation of self-identity from the colonizer found in *Wretched of the Earth* (2004) and *Black Skin White Masks* (2008). Thiong'o echoes Fanon that racism and alterity can not be overcome within systems of European domination and control (1988). Fanon's rejection of Europe in his call for alternatives is evident: "How could we fail to understand that we could have better things to do than follow in European footsteps?"(Fanon 2004:236).

Thiong'o, in his later work, took his turn away from Europe further in his decision to write and publish in Gikuyu instead of English in an effort to speak to and include Others. Just as it is important to find ways to move theory and discussions beyond Eurocentric concerns and ideology within academics and development policy, it is important to devise inclusive research methods and objectives to include non-European voices and to share research within the areas where it is collected.

The workshop

For two afternoons in November Susan and I with help from others organized a small workshop that brought together six different groups from Koro sub-county and Gulu Town. These groups were recruited because of their involvement in our research with savings clubs, my internship with SOM, or because of prior connections and relationships through my work with Beads of Awareness with different women's groups who make paper bead jewelry. There were also representatives from several different small African and international NGOs in attendance and five facilitators who lead the focus groups and help with translation.

This workshop was a great opportunity to collect data for my own research, but the main focus was to bring together these different groups to interact and to share with each other. The workshop was held in the church at Sports Outreach Ministry, and was attended each day by around 35 participants. The format for both days was similar, with the workshop broken into 3 different sections: an introduction and short presentations to begin, followed by focus group discussions that mixed the members from different groups, and closing with a brief discussion of what came out from the focus groups amongst everyone, and to revisit some of the important questions and themes of the day. Susan and I prepared a short report from the recordings and the facilitators notes which we distributed to the groups and organizations who participated in English and Luo.

Over the two days many different topics and questions were discussed, from definitions of

success, to the strengths and weaknesses of working in groups, and also the role of outsiders such as the government, NGOs and student researchers can play in supporting community-lead development. While it is not possible to examine all the topics and questions at length, a small portion is presented here. The quotes provided a bullet points below are taken as a sample from the translated recordings and transcripts of the focus groups provided by men and women from the different groups in attendance.

On Success and Groups- building community in Gulu

- For a group to be successful there should be team spirit, without team spirit they will never be successful.
- Success is related to happiness and love.
- Another way the members look at success, is in the joy they get after achieving a set goal, and this will make the entire group happy in the end, because the group will be able to grow as this success comes in the group.
- Another sign of success is growth: the group should not remain stagnant. It should grow beyond its objectives. Like for instances if you start something small and then by next year we want this thing done, and if it is done then you think beyond it to the next. So success allows for like growth.
- The greatest changes in the community for the past years has been the rising group formation of the VSLA (savings and loan associations) among the community of Gulu and the North in general. This group VSLA has brought a remarkable change in the community as people started saving money other than waiting for relief or donations from the western world. Groups that stay together for a long time show their success.
- For a group to be successful there has to be some indicators on the members. So if we start like a farming group there should be a change in them. People that were using these hand hoes, the manual digging one, they should upgrade to oxen and ploughs. So they can count that as a success.
- The success I got from being in a VSLA group is I got a loan from the group to help my daughter graduate high school and travel back to Kampala for her graduation. The loans I get from the group help in catering to feed my dairy cow

> and these have been the great success story in my life. I am paying back my loan now for my daughter to start (at) Gulu University.

What does it mean to succeed in the battle against poverty and what are the best ways to measure it? Often many development studies and experts have tended to look at quantitative statistics to measure and evaluate success through indicators such as per capita GDP, life expectancy, health and education to answer such a question (Atkinson 1999: 174). This approach is based on liberal and neoliberal theories, and gives attention to economic metrics and individual benefits according to utilitarian and market theories. However, the answers provided in the workshop offer alternative variables and indicators, which transcend individuality to include wider communities as they measure their achievements.

Community, like success, is a contested concept, often used haphazardly in development discourses and anti-poverty campaigns, however both terms are rarely defined or examined in depth (De Waal 1999). Rather than simply an abstract concept that refers to a physical location, community is connected to identities and actions. Tania Li notes in her 1996 article how the competing representations and concepts of community need to be considered in terms of how the term is deployed and the levels from where the different representations emerge (1996: 502). In much of the NGO and development discourse the term *community* includes both the sites of their projects and the individuals targeted and/or involved. In Gulu the concept of community runs deeper than this.

Drawing on Li's ethnographic reflections from Indonesia, it is important to note how simplistic concepts of tradition and sustainability as employed by NGO and development professionals to frame communities are both problematic and productive. The term can simultaneously open avenues to corporate agendas and dominant notions of rugged individualism (1996: 504) as well as create space for alternative meanings to emerge through micro-practices based on intimate relations between people and the physical environment. In Gulu the negotiation and tension to manage and build common unity comes to light in the different ways the term can be used: to indicate both collections of people in need of assistance and foreign aid, as well as repositories of resources and solutions to the problems faced in daily life and interactions.

Rather than the objective and simple manifestations that are suggested by some development NGOs and experts, instead the concept and use of the term community in Gulu is based on the shared practice and connectivity of their struggles, and reliance upon each other. The community is not objectively defined or bounded, as it is negotiated between the knowledge and links to past traditions

and ancestral understandings based on clans and geographic location, with the present realities and future expectations. This alternative way of considering community outside of European theories and development ideology follows Jean and John Comaroff's analysis of alternative understandings of person-hood amongst the Tswana in South Africa. The Comaroff's differentiate the limited of European ideology of "the autonomous person" (Comaroff 2012:51) and an independence of being, against the Tswana definitions which stress person-hood as a practice of becoming recognized through social existence and relations (Comaroff2012:58).

The importance of practice in building communities is visible in the label Community Based Organizations (CBOs). This label is used within NGO and development discourse as well as by policy makers and government ministries in Uganda as well as at the grassroots level. Interestingly while the label suggests the existence of the community before the organizations arrival or existence, it is through the practice of development or other activities that these organizations build communities where membership depends upon involvement and investment. As Li notes, though criteria and conditions for the existence of community for inclusion and opportunity according to World Bank common sense and simplified images are problematic and pose risks of exclusion or cohesion, the label community also opens space for alternative meanings and discoveries that go against the dominant expectations and ideologies (Li 1996:205).

In Gulu, the more traditional and ethnic identities of tribe and clan to identify community are still important, but many of the newer communities being created are built more on shared practice than according to ethnic structures of Acholi traditions and suggests a need to re-consider and evaluate the importance of ethnicity as dividing or uniting (Southall 2010: 83). The shared struggles to improve their lives rely on their unity, commitment and investment in each other to build these communities, and contain mechanisms to manage and restrict tensions and conflicts in the post conflict context.

Their understandings of success and community come into clearer focus when by looking at the challenges that groups identify that can undermine their unity and their successes:

- There is a problem of rumour mongering (gossiping) and this is affecting the success of the group. The solution is that people should avoid the rampant, rumour mongering about others in order to bring success in their groups.
- There is lack of unity among members (jealousy); this is always seen in scenario

where a group gets support and this support is not enough for all the members to benefit at once. Whenever it is decided that some members first get this support and the rest later, there will be total disagreement on this, hence delaying growth of group as well as members.

- Lack of group objectives is one thing that prevent group from succeeding because there will be no guide to what is to be achieved by the group, for instance many members of saving clubs are not guided on the best way to use their savings after year end when money is distributed to them, hence they end up spending the money wastefully.

Interestingly these challenges that groups face are locally situated. There is no discussion of larger global forces that lay outside groups, but instead the focus is upon the challenges created internally; challenges that groups are able to confront and resolve. Far from being robbed of their agency or being passive subjects that are pushed and pulled by larger and more abstract power structures, the responses collected in the workshop demonstrate how individuals and groups have taken ownership of their successes and the solutions to their challenges.

Success emerges through the unity of the group, and the prescriptions for proper behaviour and conduct, such as preventing gossip or jealousy which can divide the group, and make meetings a negative experience. This differs from the positivity and group support that Kica Ber members highlighted about their meetings when collecting their individual success stories and the in-depth research within the group (examined in the second chapter). Instead of looking at individual, quantitative results to monitor or evaluate the success of development in Gulu, it is also important to consider groups beyond individuals.

The potential for groups to change lives and bring development has been recognized at different levels by large international NGOs and wealthy development agencies, such as the World Bank, and by small grass roots organizations and associations in Gulu. However, because of the different levels, methods for engagements, and the differing constructions and expectations of community, the impacts have been radically different. While self-formed and grass roots groups have achieved success in Gulu, groups mobilized or motivated because of incentives and opportunities brought from the outside have often failed and created more problems which have undermined and restricted success. These different outcomes for constructed communities need to be examined and studied further, by international donors,

scholars and on the ground in Gulu.

The complications of aid

I was very fortunate to meet Charles Watmon who has a long history of working in the humanitarian aid industry in Northern Uganda and abroad, having worked two years in Ghana. He was a driving force behind the formation of Kica Ber, and his reputation, networks and experience has helped the group to grow and succeed. Charles is currently the chair-person of Kica Ber, and played a key role helping Susan and I organize the workshop. He suggested the format of a holding it over two afternoons instead of one full day, which would allow attendees time in the morning for other tasks, and that a tour of the farm at SOM would be a great educational opportunity. He also gave a lot of insight and guidance about how to manage the expectations of the attendees so that people would not be disappointed. During the workshop Charles was very active in his focus group, where together they came out with very nuanced and complex discussions about the successes and challenges groups in the area. Charles was one of the most enthusiastic attendees and afterwards spoke to me at length about how much he had enjoyed the experience.

When I first visited Charles' home he proudly gave me a tour of his property. He and his wife raise cows and pigs, have built a bio-gas generator that extracts methane from cow dung for cooking and electricity, and have a small orchard of fruit trees. In front of his home is a bore hole for drawing drinking water that benefits his family and his neighbours alike. Many of these accomplishments he completed using loans from Kica Ber. In many ways I see Charles as a mentor and something of a father figure in my development education in Gulu. Beyond discussing the research he often gave advice about my recent marriage according to Acholi customs and cultural norms between in-laws. Given his soft voice and inviting smile, it is easy to understand why so many of Kica Ber's members gave glowing compliments of their leader for his understanding and empathy.

As we sat on the veranda of his home Charles would reflect on the challenges of unity and co-operation in group activities and the *double-edged sword* of humanitarian assistance from the State or NGOs in the formation and failure of many groups. While groups can bring enormous the social and emotional benefits to their members, he highlighted the problems that resources of money or livestock given to groups often undermine their unity and cause the breakdown of groups. These resources given are usually divided among the individuals rather than employed in the intended projects, and that groups with a history of working together on agriculture or income generating projects break apart in squabbles

over the donations. In many of the development assistance projects brought by larger NGOs require that people be mobilized in groups, however the methods used made it impossible for groups to remain together. In contrast VSLA groups are united because the resources are contributed by the members, thus there can be no question of ownership, and they share a common objective and understand the time line for activities. Unlike when resources are given from the outside, of cash or livestock that will be divided amongst individuals, the savings and loan groups exist and benefit people because the members do not act and think as individuals but as part of something larger, shared with others.

> Many groups started because some grant was coming in. Let me give two examples: there was a small poultry house built near here for two groups of people with HIV/AIDS by an NGO. Those ones formed themselves because there was that money coming. So when the money came they started poultry. This was common, but it doesn't work. It started alright maybe, but quickly it totally fell apart.
> My experience is that if a group is formed because a donor is giving money that group won't last. But our group, that formed itself as a savings and loan association, we worked for 3 years and didn't receive money from outside. This year was the first time we got a small amount of money from the government. We agreed: "This money isn't mine, it isn't yours, it is for the group." So what we are going to do is allow you to borrow the money. You borrow for one month then you have to bring it back. We have been very serious about this money because they told us they will follow up. This is seed money, and what is expected of seed: you are supposed to take it and go plant the crop and then it can extend (grow or move forward). So for us we agreed with our members we have to take care of it, and we will take care of it. If we are still in a group then that money will not be wasted and it will not go anywhere. We want it to multiply.
> Did you form the group because you expected to get some money or did you form the group because you had a vision, something like that. So for us we are going to work hard. But that feeling is there (that can undermine and destroy groups)- that this money is after all a donation and that anyone can play around with it. But not with us. (Charles Watmon 29/11/2013)

The responses shared in the workshop connected success to the unity and hard work of the group. Success was not an individual achievement, but something that was broader, and went further to foster harmony and investment in each other. However as Charles notes, support from the outside can have both positive or negative impacts. Groups that formed according to local demand and investment were more likely to be successful, however groups that came together only in response to the conditions and demands of donors planted the seeds of the group failure from its inception. One of the weaknesses by NGOs and other outside donors that has allowed so many groups to fail is the poor communication between the recipients and the donors. Often groups are unclear whether there will be follow-up or not; either when follow-up occurs the groups have already fallen apart, or groups will struggle to maintain their unity and shared purpose, but after some months if the donors do not come to follow-up then members in groups begin to cheat or steal from the common resources.

Another problem that can limits the impacts of NGO involvement with and support of groups may be best termed as dependency or expectation. Despite the intention to help, and the popularity of 'sustainability' and 'empowerment' in development discourse, careful attention is needed to ensure that the empowerment and autonomy of groups is not undermined by NGO or State support. Within the workshop the challenges of unrealistic or misplaced expectations that remain after the war came out in the focus group questions regarding the role of the government or NGOs:

- If possible, a sponsorship program should be initiated for the children of our group members. Even if they could be supported with school fees for at least a child in each family...
- NGO should help the elderly people by constructing for them houses because most of the aged people lack accommodation and support.
- One challenge our group faces is there is no organization or person who has come to support the group to attain goats.

Just as NGOs can create false communities who are not invested in each other, the ability of VSLA and indigenous NGOs to help liberate their members from dependency and expectations is compromised and undermined by the approaches used in humanitarian relief to give out resources quickly and with poor management and the legacies of colonial mentalities of power and wealth.

Eurocentric ideologies and the indoctrination of inequality that casts Africa in the role of impoverished/unable is the binary opposite to a wealthy/powerful West, who's role is to provide salvation. While the workshop attendees recognized their own successes and achievements, there remained unfilled expectations for outsiders to provide.

The challenge of expectation and dependency is one that can ‘t be avoided or ignored today in Gulu. While organizing this workshop this challenge presented itself, of how to manage and overcome the hang-over effects of NGOs in Gulu of an impoverished local community contrasted with unlimited wealth of foreigners. This challenge was encountered first hand in my own research, and has been a continually problematic theme since I first began some of my development activities in partnership with different groups in Gulu. Beyond my own anxieties and insecurities in how to witness poverty and injustice, the more corrosive impact remains the idea that I can somehow bring enough money to enrich everyone and make their lives easy.

Transport allowance and Sitting Fees

One of the challenges and outcomes that we faced in organizing the workshop was the question of whether or not to give some compensation to attendees. Because some of the participants were coming from long distances Susan and I decided that we would provide transportation for the groups, or reimburse them for their expenses if they used their own vehicle or came on a motorcycle taxi. Another required expense to organize the workshop was small snacks and refreshments for attendees. Charles and the other leaders at Kica Ber had offered the advice that holding the workshop over two afternoons would save some money as we could avoid providing a full lunch, which would be required in a full day workshop. While the decision was made with the intention to ensure the meeting would be accessible, it did highlight some of the problems of why people choose to attend such workshops or meetings, and whether the groups in attendance could organize such events in future themselves

Charles reflected on the challenges of *sitting allowances* as we sat at his house. He had just attended a workshop held by a large international NGO, and many of the attendees had gone away disappointed because it was only once they had arrived at the meeting they were informed there would be no allowance.

> When people were in the camps one thing that NGOs did that was not very good, maybe because of survival, for example in a water and hygiene workshop, in those

> days when they organized training they paid you at the end of the day. This thing entered in our minds so much and so at this time people expect money to be given. Just recently I was at a training and at the last moment they only told us that they don't give money for attendance. We were so disappointed. In those days we were given, so I was expecting some little money which they did not (provide). And when they explained it was OK, it was good. But it takes time to change peoples minds. It will take time.
>
> Whenever a meeting is called NGOs give money, NGOs had lots of money at that time. So for government when they called a meeting it was very difficult for people to attend because the government doesn't have money to give people. So when the government calls people don't go, but when NGO calls people will go because they know they will get something. NGO did not prepare people to forget about this sitting allowance. Some of them left while still paying that money.
>
> (Charles Watmon 29/11/2013)

Charles recognized how putting monetary incentives meant that people weren't making any commitment or investment in the meetings, instead they simply attended to get the money and missed much of the intended benefit.

> When people they go they know that they will get something. They may not be active or take interest, they don't take any knowledge, they only go to get the money. When I worked with World Vision people only came because of money but if you check, people did not learn much. That is one thing that must change. They should have prepared people, and should have started withdrawing bit by bit so when they left people's minds have changed. (Charles Watmon 29/11/2013)

The unintended consequences and impacts of NGOs and humanitarian relief during the war have brought challenges that have remained after the war. It is also important to recognize how the community continues to struggle with these. Sitting allowances are a topic that everyone in Gulu can comment upon. While some people see no problems with how NGOs giving out money at that time,

there are others who can identify corruption and many problems in the practice. "NGOs collected signatures and send to their donors. That is what they did, not develop us, but chew money in trainings and workshops." (Richard 08/07/20013)

Charles' account and Richards comment recognize the challenges that NGO practices of reporting and evaluation bring forward. In this case in order to ensure that the target numbers of people were reached for workshops during the war incentives were given for attendance, and remains in the community, known as a *sitting allowance*.

In hind sight I have a lot of mixed opinions about providing refreshment and a transportation allowance. Providing such small compensations and allowances to encourage participation is the norm, because of the influence of NGOs with large budgets. By signing the attendance list, which later would help the NGO report back to its donors about the numbers of people involved in their activities, attendees would receive their money after the lunch was served. I've heard many stories over the years about how everyone would leave such events immediately after being fed and paid, and this became the reason to attend, not for the sensitization or to provide their input, thus failing to buy into NGO's objective. Terms such as *sitting allowance* have become everyday terms to reflect both the corruption that has emerged through such a practice (where reportedly to fill workshops people would be solicited from on the street and encouraged to sign the attendance sheet, in some cases with a fake name or fake title, such as local leader, health care provider, etc.) but also the expectations by community groups and members that they should receive something for their time. During the war when many large NGOs had large budgets sitting allowances increased as different NGOs competed with each other to fill their workshops.

For our own workshop the decision to provide a small compensation and light snacks and refreshments was made in light of the expectations that at such an event there would be something given, even if it was small. To provide nothing risked that many people may not attend: some may not have the money to pay for their transport, or would not come for the second day, and attendees would leave disappointed, hungry and thirsty. However coordinating even a basic transport refund became complicated, as some of the members arrived by foot, and others who travelled from town were able to get a ride with the facilitators and organizers for the event, so they spent nothing. Keeping track of who arrived by what means was too difficult, and to hand back money to some guests and not others would only create jealousy and tension, so ultimately each person who attended, regardless of how they arrived and what costs they incurred to attend was equally compensated a

small amount.

Beyond the ethical problems in anthropological research this presents, what I have reflected most upon after the workshop is the challenge that Charles notes in his comments about *not preparing people* and allowing an unsustainable expectation to continue. While I was concerned about not placing an onerous burden on the attendees, I also perpetuated a barrier that may be limiting and holding back community mobilization. As Charles notes, people don't want to attend when the government or local NGOs hold events if they will get nothing. Many people at the workshop expressed their interest to see more of these type of events, but recognized that their own groups lacked the budget for transport and feeding. They requested that similar events be organized *for* them in future, because they lacked the necessary budget to organize and host such an event themselves. Interestingly the issue of sitting allowance, or the requirements for snacks and refreshments do not exist in the regular weekly or monthly meetings of savings clubs, CBOs or local NGOs. It seems only once unusual events are organized that these expectations arise.

Sitting allowance has also become integrated into the practice of corruption within government offices. Through other friends working in the development and NGO fields in Gulu, I have heard complaints that government officials will not attend events or community meetings if they are not offered some compensation for their appearance (Bayart 2004: 455; 2009). Their need for *airtime*, some small money in order to make phone calls, is another common hurdle that NGOs and CSOs must decide how to navigate. If some small money is not provided to cover phone costs, fuel, printing expenses, etc. when dealing with authority figures in Gulu, there is a risk that your request will not move forward or be approved. I don't know how common sitting allowances or requests for airtime were in Gulu before the war, but from many accounts I have heard NGOs had a strong influence in the expansion and entrenchment of these practices. It reflects on the concerns expressed by NGO critics of the power they wield, as corruption in Uganda has resulted in millions of dollars that have disappeared instead of going towards recovery projects in the north, and the increasing alienation of the citizenry when government officials listen more to foreigners with money than their own constituents.

In part because of the problems of corruption that are derailing and impeding development and recovery in Northern Uganda, whether coming from the State or foreign NGOs, groups like Kica Ber and SOM are working to become self-reliant. This self-reliance and self-direction is part of the necessary liberation that these groups are struggling to achieve.

Concluding Remarks

I have come to learn during this research and writing my MA thesis that one of the greatest challenges faced by ethnographers is to bring to life a foreign site; one that many readers may have never visited, nor will they ever. I feel the weight of responsibility to speak accurately and fairly about a community that I have come to embrace as my home that fulfils both the requirements and standards of Anthropology and the academy, and that resonates with daily life and the perspectives of people in Gulu. It is not a small weight to carry. It is my intention that portions of this thesis be made available in Gulu, to both my research collaborators and to those who implement policy and can alter it, whether these people are found in NGO offices or in positions within the local government. One of the requests put forward during the workshop in November was that the information people so generously shared should be presented and made available in Gulu. This coincides well with my own personal values and views of what I set out to accomplish in this research, and why success stories, instead of other narratives, were selected as a guiding theme and research focus.

The elephant in the room throughout the writing and re-writing of this thesis, has always been that while there are numerous places to encounter success stories, these stories are still too few. This opinion comes not only from the perspective of a foreign research student, but also from the majority of my research collaborators. I think they would agree with me that the work is far from over, and that recovery after the civil war does not come quickly or easily. While I have challenged the western preoccupation with statistics and economic measures there are a few that simply need to be spoken and acknowledged before this paper can be brought to a close. Uganda has one of the fastest growing populations in Africa and the world currently. This would not be a problem if unemployment rates amongst the youth, who are more than 50% of the population demographic, were not so high. Similarly, while a high birth rate may present many opportunities, nor is it my place to recommend appropriate family sizes, the high rate of maternal and infant mortality rates because of an under-funded and over worked health sector are heart breaking. Nearly 20 women die each day in child birth and still more than 10% of children born do not reach age five[21]. These statistics have nothing to do with the country's location in Africa, as some Afro-pessimists may suggest, but rather reflect the unbalanced distribution of resources globally and the rampant corruption with the Ugandan political scene and global capitalism. As many brilliant writers such as Susan George (1992), Jacques Gelinas (1998) and Joseph Stiglitz

[21] According to the Ugandan Ministry of Health

(2012, 2002) among many others have written, corruption within a country is not the concern and fault of a single nation, but rather an embarrassment to the entire global community.

Uganda as a country and many Ugandans of different backgrounds and in different regions of the country do not stand idly by or block off their eyes and ears to these realities. Instead there are many people across the country working hard to bring change and improvement to their country. And that is why success stories are important to be told. Negativity and defeatist mentalities will not change the difficulties that can be found in Uganda. The solutions to many of the country's problems lie within its citizens and its organizations and associations. These success stories need to be shared. This approach to counter-discourse and critical exposition connects to the debates within anthropology that some practitioners suggest is a responsibility and obligation for the discipline (Biehl and McKay 2012; Clarke 2010; Checker 2008). These calls are especially important and salient given the history of anthropology in Africa.

The success stories presented here are varied and belong to many different people and organizations. My own personal success story of organizing the workshop and being able to share my research within Gulu is by far the most modest, and probably has the shortest time horizon in its impacts. The stories of how VSLA have allowed people to slowly begin transforming their lives, or how SOM has created a safe space for youth and children to escape from the negative influences of alcohol, despondency and alienation are much more powerful in their objectives and in their impacts. I am very excited to continue working with such people in their community who are leading change and deploying their tools of liberation to empower and instill values of self-help and self-reliance.

On VSLA

Savings and loan groups, despite the challenges they face, are able to mobilize a surprising amount of money, and are definitely having an impact in improving their communities. Because of the bureaucratic challenges of opening a bank account, and the long distances to reach bank for those who live outside large urban centres, VSLA groups provide a reliable and affordable means for people to save money and to gain access to credit. Many in Gulu have told me how a savings culture is not a part of their traditional Acholi practices, and as such it is important that new groups receive training on strategies and rationales for savings, or that existing groups train and recruit new members. Groups are especially important as members are able to learn from the examples and knowledge of each other, and the group social pressure provides an incentive that people should find some small money each week to

bring to the meetings. Alone it is easy for someone to find excuses why not to save, or to be defeated by negative attitudes that there is no income to be saved, but in a group the fellow members and leaders can help such members identify how and from where they can pinch their savings. Examples include when doing garden work for money to ensure to save 1/3 of the money earned. Or, after a harvest to save some of the money earned selling their crop. Many of the women particularly who I came to know through VSLA groups were involved in many different economic generating activities such as farming, selling in the local markets, raising livestock and doing small garden work for money in the community. Despite the limited employment opportunities in the formal economic sectors, there is no limit of creativity in creating opportunities in the informal economy.

Savings group also provide a solution to the challenges of accessing credit in Gulu and mitigate the pressure and strain that taking loans from family members or friends puts on relationships. The groups provide a means to access loans and the rules for how repayment works are clearly understood by all the members. This means to access credit can help those engaged in small entrepreneurial activities to pick loans to grow their businesses to a larger level. Groups are also a valuable partner for government outreaches, or from international and national organizations, to bring business training activities or other skills training or sensitization. VSLA groups that are already formed and mobilized reduce the costs for these agents to engage with the people at the grassroots who are often the targeted beneficiaries for their activities.

While groups must overcome the challenge of introducing a culture of savings, they also are working to instill confidence in members that they use loans for profitable business activities. This is a definition of what empowerment means. Perhaps it may be read as too close to World Bank and other commercial and corporate solutions for poverty reduction and development for some critics of development, in the case of the rural communities in Northern Uganda who have experienced war and humanitarian relief, trainings and empowerment to overcome dependency and encouragement self-reliance and economic independence are vital. Differing from popular micro-finance methods that risk indebting or exploiting those who take loans, VSLA encourages saving with geographically and culturally appropriate methods for income generation that is raising the socio-economic standards of its members.

The attention and focus upon success stories at Kica Ber can't erase the challenges that remain or silence discussion and attention to them. I do not suggest that savings and loan is a silver bullet that can cure poverty or defeat the weaknesses in current development models and practices. Instead the stories

from Kica Ber offer an alternative practice that can should encourage further investigations for alternatives to challenge the negativity that has too long been imposed as a history and present day realities for Africa. Not only does Kica Ber offer a different representation of Gulu than NGOs or the international media who focus upon the victimization of the area, it is important to recognize how the practices of savings and loan communities in Gulu are undertaking their own approaches and their own interpretations to fund-raising and development.

On Saving NGOs

> "Regarding NGOs, I can say they have done both good things and bad. Some of the good things are the jobs they have brought for educated people here. Of course when the war was still here they fed people and kept them alive in the camps. But there was also the infrastructure they have built. They paid school fees and gave scholarships. Today you see so many people in the North who have graduated university and gone on to get good jobs because of NGOs. If the NGOs hadn't been there the difference between the north and the south of the country would have been even bigger than it is today. Definitely NGOs have done good things."
> (Charles Watmon 29/11/2013)

Sports Outreach Ministry is one of many NGOs started by Ugandans that works closely with an engaged and invested community. The successes they have achieved are closely connected to the long relationship they have built with their neighbours and the interaction between the organizations objectives, the community needs and desires, and the far reaching networks of foreign supporters that SOM is able to bring to the grass roots.

I have met several people in Gulu who got their first jobs and early experience in development because of the jobs they got with international organizations and have gone on to start their own projects within the local community. Many of these projects which work closely with youth groups, schools, and people living with HIV/AIDS have developed innovative solutions to assist with access to education, improved nutrition and health, and trainings in practical skills, especially agriculture remain valuable drivers of social change and recovery in their home communities. Instead of limiting the discussion to criticism and short comings of NGOs, it is also important to recognize the positive impacts that NGOs have brought out. As Charles notes, without NGOs the gap between the northern regions and the

southern end of the county would have been even larger than where currently stands (Shaw and Mbabazi 2008). Access to many social services such as health and education have relied on assistance from the international community because of the limited and low quality services provided by the state. Though achievements may be slow, awareness of the many human rights discourses and protections have been introduced because of the presence of NGOs. In many cases such successes have arrived because of partnerships and connections between international NGOs and smaller Ugandan NGOs or CBOs.

Invisible Children's *Kony 2012* video campaign and earlier videos have made frequent appearances in my thesis, and I have been very critical of them. But it would be unfair not to recognize the achievements of Invisible Children (IC) on the ground. On a very personal level, IC has touched and transformed the lives of many friends and close associates in Gulu with their school scholarship programs. IC's role in encouraging former abductees to return from the bush, and awareness campaigns in North America have made an impact in the breakup of the LRA, though its leader Joseph Kony and a few hundred rebels remain at large. Strangely I find that Invisible Children does a very poor job of communicating their successes amongst the community in Gulu, and instead, until the blow back from *Kony 2012,* has continued to portray a very much stereotyped and out-dated picture of an African region in need of salvation. Instead its films should have been made about the renovations and new classroom blocks that they have constructed in numerous schools, their VSLA programs, skills training and rehabilitation facilities for traumatized returnees. These are the stories that should have been highlighted more. Very recently in Gulu there have been announcements that IC will leave Uganda and shift its focus to the DRC and CAR. This has upset many IC alumni and other members of the community, first because IC has focused so closely on the Gulu region for its fund-raising, but equally because it has been effective and successful in many of its varied activities.

In a similar vein, while critical attention on larger NGOs and engagement in debates and critiques of the industry as a whole are valuable, as watch-dogs and whistle blowers to hold the powerful accountable, it is important we don't fail to include local activists and smaller, national organizations. In Uganda the Black Monday movement has emerged amongst political activists working to stop government corruption and encourage good governance in the county. There are numerous health organizations, such as TASO (The Aids Support Organization), who have taken on the enormous challenge of improving health standards and service delivery in the country, and working to address stigma and prejudice against people living with the virus. Beyond the local organizations, many large

international NGOs and other global organizations are staffed by highly qualified and hardworking Ugandans. In the critical attention and interrogation of both domestic and international NGOs by foreign researchers and academics, there is a degree of caution necessary, given the relative degrees of privilege and opportunity that foreigners have to speak that is not equally accorded to many Ugandan academics and professionals.

One of the most revealing insights about a major difference that can be found between NGOs based within the African continent vs those based outside of it, or solely funded by outsiders, resonates with a critique of the reasons why human rights movements and human rights discourses have not been embraced on the African continent. In an article published by the Carnegie Council's Human Rights Dialogue 2.1 (winter 1999) Chidi Anselm Odinkalo writes that many African human rights organizations "modelled after Northern watchdog organizations, located in an urban area, run by a core management without a membership base and dependent solely on overseas funding" are unable, and uninterested, in connecting with the community and sharing the conversation. This same critique, of lacking a membership base, being geographically, and ideologically, distant and the lack of conversation and interaction severely undermine and compromise the ability of any of the largest and most globally influential NGOs to empower rural communities in Northern Uganda. In order for such organizations to build the necessary relationships of trust and mutual investment and ownership in order to achieve the ambitious goals of changing lives and combating alienation and dependency it is necessary that either they partner with locally-based, member organizations and associations, or they radically alter their approach to project planning and time lines for implementation. It is not possible to drop in and out of communities if the objectives are for long term and lasting impacts. While the staff of many of the largest NGOs that operate in Gulu today are Ugandan, and often Acholi, the socio-economic divides between the office managers and project staff who arrive in large Land Rovers create their own divides and divisions from the communities where they work.

On Fanon and liberation

Frantz Fanon's life ended prematurely, but his intellectual impact continues to resonate up to the current day. He didn't live long enough to see the end of European colonial administration in Africa, only the few first steps, about which he wrote passionately (Fanon 1967). His predictions of the problems which would not end quickly in Africa, of elitism and patronage have come true and been closely analyzed by later writers who followed him (Mbembe 2008; Bayart 1989). Throughout this

thesis Fanon has provided a theoretical framework as a means to think outside and around the Western limitations too often found in the negatives writings on Africa. While much of Fanon's writings and theoretical work encounters problems and weaknesses with more than 50 years after independence in Uganda and many other African nations, as well as the abandonment by many of Marxism and socialism in the current globalized and neo-liberal world structure, Fanon's calls for liberation and a move beyond the impasses and limitations imposed upon peoples of non-European descent are as urgent and important as when he wrote them. His calls for liberation, using local resources, local knowledge systems and in resistance to any domination by the powerful, Eurocentric forces can found in Gulu today for those who look for them.

Fanon always recognized that victories would not come quickly or easily. While this may be of little consolation for those who live without the most basic of resources and rights, such as clean water, education and health services, Fanon's fighting spirit and determination lives on through them. They recognize, as Fanon did, that the struggle is necessary, and that passivity and patience will only result in greater disappointment, and further delays of the long awaited arrival of liberation and justice to reverse the inequalities of the world today. According to Fanon the proof of success towards achieving liberation "lies in a social fabric that been changed inside out. This change is extraordinarily important because it is desired, clamoured for, and demanded" (Fanon 2004: 1).

The injustice and inequality are not only products that are imposed from the outside, but have become internalized. Through the practices found within Kica Ber and other savings groups, and through the religious philosophy and community engagement at Sports Outreach Ministries, Fanon's fight against the marginalized and inferior status of non-Europeans comes to life. Liberation can not be given, but must be taken through struggle Fanon wrote at a moment when the world was quickly changing. Though the world has continued to move quickly, and change continues to roll forward at what may feel like an increasing pace in Gulu, some of the necessary changes have not arrived or occurred quickly enough. Thus these groups have embarked on a struggle that can best be understood through Fanon: they are choosing to take what is theirs, instead of waiting any longer for someone to come and give it to them. They have recognized that their liberation can not be given by donors or others. It is up to them to build their communities wherein it is embraced and taken through their collective actions and investment in each other.

This achievement of liberation, even though it remains only partial and is slow to germinate, is one of the greatest success stories I witnessed during my field research in 2013. Success and

achievement are some of the themes I find most interesting for continued research and applied practice in Gulu. The civil war, which has been so poorly explained and understood outside of Northern Uganda, is now over. There are still many steps to be taken towards reconciliation, remedy and reparation which have achieved attention from the United Nations, foreign scholars and political rights organizations and NGOs. But these are not the only important areas of focus, and may not be the most salient amongst those who have lived through the years of trauma, displacement and violence in the region. Instead the stories of resilience, recovery and re-construction in Northern Uganda are a vast terrain for scholarship that too often are forgotten or prematurely abandoned.

Following Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman's *Remaking a World*, in Gulu it is appropriate to shift our focus from violence to how communities that have faced violence survive and recover. I find this approach towards ethnography, anthropology and an engagement with the construction of Africa far more satisfying personally, and more constructive as a collaborative practice and means to bring creativity and local expertise into development.

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