reflect more on the gendered (non)local positionality of all those who are involved in (gender) knowledge production: respondents, researchers, and research assistants. Moreover, it is crucial to reflect upon the impact of the embeddedness of all involved on the development of local approaches and put more effort into changing the power relations between researchers and research assistants from the Global South and Global North. This also means closely scrutinising the ways in which neo-colonial attitudes and ethnicised or racialised views can be avoided in research processes (see, e.g., Mwambari 2019). Finally, researchers of transitional justice from the Global North should discuss how they might challenge the current structural hierarchies between academia in the Global North and the Global South.

In short, the volume *Rethinking Transitional Gender Justice. Transformative Approaches in Post-Conflict Settings* offers significant inputs about the development and implementation of transformative gender justice, not just for critical researchers but also for practitioners. In doing so, the volume can inspire readers to reflect on new research agendas beyond the ones presented here.

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Critical Cultural Studies of Childhood

Grace Maria Kentaro

Namuggala, V. F. 2018. *Childhood, Youth Identity, and Violence in Formerly Displaced Communities in Uganda*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Childhood, Youth Identity, and Violence in Formerly Displaced Communities in Uganda, by Victoria Flavia Namuggala, presents the results of research on the impact that

violence has had on the construction of childhood and youth identity in formerly displaced communities in Northern Uganda. Northern Uganda suffered a chronic civil war that was waged by the Government of Uganda and a number of rebel groups, among which the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) was the main group that was active in the region for 22 years between 1987 and 2009. The war saw violations of human rights on a mass scale and irrespective of age or gender. As a result, it led to severe post-war trauma among the persons and communities affected. Children who were born during the time of this war never experienced peace and were exposed to an overwhelming series of violence-related acts, like the sexual abuse of abducted girls and the recruitment of boys as child soldiers into rebel army groups. It was through such incidences that Victoria Namuggala, then a gender scholar at Makerere University, became inspired to investigate in her master- and PhD-level studies how armed violence denied youth their childhood rights.

The book starts by illustrating how childhood is conceptualised in terms of one's identity, sense of belonging, entitlement, roles, and responsibilities. In situations of armed conflict, childhood is defined in terms of the level of protection accorded to an individual and his or her access to the services of humanitarian assistance provided in the region. The author explores and analyses how circumstances shape and influence the conceptualisation of childhood, how local perceptions relating to children have shifted over the years as a result of the armed conflict and displacement and how children position themselves both during and after encampment and displacement. Understandings of childhood vary greatly, and so, too, do the societal contexts; however, the author argues that childhood constructions are largely informed by the Western context, which does not accommodate indigenous approaches, especially in the Global South and also in poor regions in the Global North. She discusses the specific characteristics of childhood in Western and non-Western settings while highlighting those contradictions that emerge using the case of the war, particularly the war with the LRA that affected northern Uganda, and how it affected the lives of many people, especially children who were caught up in the violence.

The book further describes an ideal childhood as a time for children to be in school and to play in order to grow strong and confident with the love and encouragement of their family and extended community of caring adults. During this time children are supposed to be free from fear, safe from violence, and protected from abuse and exploitation. However, the children in northern Uganda, who have been largely affected by armed conflict and displacement, have been denied all these aspects that characterise childhood because they may not have families, nor do they have protection or love. Many experience or have experienced physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation.

The book also engages with the global discourses on internal displacement and reveals that armed conflict is the leading cause of forced displacement and encampment. In this context, the author cites UNICEF (2016), which has shown that armed violence was a key cause of the internal displacement of about 12.4 million people in African alone by the end of 2015. The largest number of these people are women and children. In Uganda, the author asserts that, as well as the armed civil war between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Government of Uganda, the main causes of the internal displacement of persons in the northern and northeast regions have been unbalanced economic development, a thirst for political power, tribalism, historical events like colonialism, external interference, religious fundamentalism, poverty and unemployment, struggles for power, environmental degradation, corporate globalisation, and social inequalities. The author argues that based on the extent of the effect of wars on children and youth, there was a need to explore the views and experiences of the victims. To do this, the author utilised a feminist critique of the understanding of war in relation to gender relations and the gendered impact of armed conflict for her investigations.

The book also gives a brief overview of global armed violence and highlights its serious consequences. It was identified that armed conflict leads to the loss of life on a large scale and hinders growth and development economically and politically. It also causes violations of human rights and hinders access to social services like education and health. However, it is worse in developing countries, particularly in Africa, where the author lists a number of countries that have been affected by armed conflict. These include Uganda, Liberia, Somalia, DRC, Rwanda, Sudan, Sierra Leon, or Angola. The author writes that because of the large number of countries in Africa that have been affected by armed conflict many young people's rights, ranging from access to education to living standards, have equally been affected; and in Uganda this is true even though the country is a signatory to international and regional policy documents that have also been domesticated into national laws to protect and promote human rights.

In the fourth chapter the author presents one of the most interesting and touching parts of the book, which explores the transition to adulthood and the roles of children therein. The author asserts that the transition from childhood to adulthood is a process not for the individual alone but rather for the family and community. In northern Uganda becoming an adult involves the community's endorsement of one's maturity, and it is not just about numerical age. This implies that children's status and roles are marked not by numerical age but by the kinds of everyday tasks they perform and are expected to perform in their respective societies. Namuggala gives examples from India and Ethiopia where she states that conceptions of childhood in those countries are in some cases measured in terms of work. In India, for instance, a girl's

functional age is demonstrated by how much rice she can cook, while in Ethiopian communities it is about how much coffee and Injera (traditional bread) she can make. In the same way, in northern Uganda, age is determined by functionality – for example, by how many siblings one can efficiently care for in the absence of parents. The gendered construction of adulthood through the feminisation of such a social division of labour becomes very clear. The author supports her analysis with narratives from respondents obtained during her field research. According to her findings, one of the respondents stated that 'when a girl can cook especially Atapa [an Ateso term meaning local meal made out of millet flour and boiled water], and does not burn her body in the process of preparing the meal, when she can take good care of her siblings, for example bathing them, feeding them, and maintaining the house, then she is ready for marriage, because those are the signs that she will be in position to take care of her own home and children' (p. 58). The locals also believed that when a girl gets her own biological children, she stops being a child because a child cannot have a child. A child mother is expected to change her conduct, and if she does not, other women can sit her down and advise her on how mothers should behave. This is because other women feel embarrassed when a child mother behaves in abnormal ways, as other people may end up generalising about the behaviour of other women based on a single badly behaved child mother. Local women believe that motherhood is a constant reminder to young mothers about their new identity and the roles and responsibilities that stem from that. This means that child mothers must give up their childhood status to their babies and adopt the motherhood status in order to fit into the community. Child mothers are taught their maternal role of safeguarding their children in the private sphere, within the homes, and not in public spaces, unless it is under adult supervision, such as at school. However, as the author indicates, in northern Uganda homes are no longer safe places for raising children because of domestic violence, drug abuse, and alcohol abuse, and early and forced marriages, especially after the war.

The book focuses on the youth and Namuggala argues that the youth are defined by what they are not. They are neither adults and nor children. They are not independent and yet not entirely dependent on anyone. The youth do not like being given instructions by their elders, yet they do not know what to do with their lives. In her findings, one key informant noted that the definition of the youth in northern Uganda remains vague because they tend to belong to various categories simultaneously, which consequently positions them nowhere in particular, hence their lack of a sense of belonging. The youth are neither children nor adults, yet they significantly contribute to both categories and have characteristic attributes of both categories. Female youth, for example, belong everywhere, yet in a real sense belong nowhere, so they miss out on assistance and relief from humanitarian

agencies during civil wars and displacements, something that exacerbates their livelihood resilience.

The book further interrogates girlhood, violence, and humanitarian assistance as a major component of survival during situations of distress and displacement that were experienced after over twenty years of violence, which was characterised by starvation, sexual violence, survival sex, beatings, detention, arrests, and the torture of civilians. The author notes that there was human assistance to the affected persons in the region; however, this humanitarian assistance was accompanied by its own controversies, especially from the perspective of the beneficiaries. For instance, humanitarian assistance at times facilitates violence, particularly against young women. This is sometimes due to the lack of clear objectives about how to facilitate the beneficiaries based on age or gender. Also, some humanitarian assistance operates through the dominant structures of cultural patriarchy that sustain the power hierarchies that favour men. Therefore, the author argues that, specifically with respect to northern Uganda, assistance that was meant to be directed to survivors in post-war northern Uganda has often been misrepresented, especially based on gender and age. Therefore, clear objectives need to be drafted in order to hear the voices of the marginalized survivors of war and focus on post-war reconstruction.

The author also presents a series of strategies that need to be adopted in order to combat violence against women and girls in Uganda. She first acknowledges the efforts and important steps that the Government of Uganda has so far taken to improve the position of women and girls through policies geared towards gender equality. Uganda as a country has gone ahead to ratify several international human rights treaties that explicitly prohibit gender-based violencefor example, the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), among others. The author noted that the Government of Uganda declared zero tolerance of violence against women by adopting various international policies into national laws – for instance, putting in place measures like the Domestic Violence Act (2010), which prohibits violence against women, the Trafficking of Persons Act (2009), the prohibition of female genital mutilation, and the creation of child and family protection units at police stations. However, much has yet to be done in the implementation of these treaties.

This book argues quite clearly about the rights of women, especially the child mothers and the youth who are usually ignored, especially during war. The author for instance, focuses on the agency and resilience of these young people during the conflict and in the post-conflict situation. She explores the coping strategies that

young people in northern Uganda have adopted during these challenging times given the fact that the region has encountered many other problems, which include poverty, natural disasters like droughts and floods, cattle rustling, and disease outbreaks. This book presents a deep look into how young people have managed to survive these complex multidimensional challenges by exploring the choices and decisions they have made.

The book's author clearly demonstrates how childhood, youth identity, and violence in formerly displaced communities in Uganda are key gender issues that need to be brought into limelight. For instance, the author was able to clearly identify how the various perceptions of childhood, youth, and motherhood are often misinterpretations in northern Uganda, as each stage is determined by function and not age. This puts some children in a vulnerable situation. Youth are being misrepresented based on age and gender. Apart from this, the assistance directed to the youth further exacerbates violence against them because of it is operated in a patriarchal setting and lacks clear objectives and knowledge about youth resilience. This means that there is must that needs yet to be done by the Government of Uganda and its partners, as well as by researchers, in order to safeguard the identities of childhood, youth, and adulthood in the post-war atmosphere of northern Uganda. This is because persons included in the categories of children and youth are often silenced in such humanitarian contexts, yet they face endless hardships. They need someone to advocate for their liberation. This book is a very resourceful reference material for policy-makers and other stakeholders working in humanitarian settings.

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