

PROJECT PROFILE

Cross-Border Wars, Sexuality and Citizenship

Hub Members

Dr Grace Akello, Gulu
University



About the Project

Uganda's soldiers are frequently deployed across national borders to provide security assistance in war-affected countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), South Sudan, the Central Africa Republic and Somalia. In addition, Uganda's soldiers are also often engaged in internal missions, usually working on short notice, and being sent to various regions experiencing security threats. Although soldiers are deployed with an understanding that the assignment will only take a few weeks to complete, generally these engagements are protracted in nature.

This project conducted 28 months of ethnographic research with soldiers, cross-border war-women and soldiers' families to better understand their physical, sexual, and mental health experiences as well as changes in their familial and social relations. It aims to develop gender-sensitive amendments in military institutional frameworks and policy guidelines for building stronger security institutions that address and respond to the soldiers' conduct on deployment and that meet the gendered needs and rights of the women and children with whom they form temporary relations. In doing so, this project also develops a 'soldier life event scale' measuring key life incidents and measuring everyday stressors in soldier's lives and the people associated with them.

Key Findings

- **Military deployments are often protracted with high casualty rates.** Despite this, soldiers are often sent on multiple long-term deployments. Although military deployments within and across national borders are often conceived as short-term missions aimed at improving the security situation in weeks, in the recent past, most missions have been protracted, resulted in high casualty rates and have often taken years to complete. The Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces (UPDF) deployment to the DRC is one prime example. The mission, though only planned for a few weeks, ended up lasting three years from 2000 – 2003.
- **Frequent deployments are being driven by neoliberal incentives.** In most of the conflicts that soldiers are deployed to, Uganda has no specific interests – these are conflicts outside of Uganda's borders that are being fought for neoliberal incentives where war and money are intertwined. This also extends to the soldiers' motives who volunteer for deployment – which might be based on financial reward and not because they believe in restoring peace and normalcy.
- **Soldiers engage in relationships and create families whilst on deployment, in what they term 'temporary families'.** Many male soldiers form consensual social relationships with women on deployment. They see these relationships as temporary and therefore often do not make plans to deal with the long-term outcomes, including when they have children with the cross-border 'war-women'. In response, some women feel compelled to leave their country and move to Uganda to join their spouses when the soldiers return to Uganda.



War-women must be viewed as people enmeshed in complex social unions and though entangled in them with soldiers, soldiers are not able to mitigate or manage them, in part due to institutional barriers and financial constraints. //

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- **Repatriation policies have left a population of war-women and deployed soldiers in Uganda who are gazetted and do not qualify for state support.** Starting in 2000, all military were repatriated back to Uganda with the families they formed during deployment. The UPDF has repatriated about 400 women and children from the DRC alone. The state allows the families entry, and they are settled in various refugee camps, but they do not qualify for further state support. While many of the children know their fathers are *afande* (a soldier), and know their title and rank within the military, this is still not deemed sufficient evidence for them to receive support as an additional family member.
- **Hundreds of children have been born as a result of these short-term relationships leading to an increase in *aguu* (street children).** Many war-women with older children relocate from the gazetted villages to urban and peri-urban centres to access jobs. Some war-women prefer to live in the barracks. However, because soldiers are deployed frequently, spouses of deployed soldiers are sent out of the barracks. Such women and children then become homeless. These changes can cause tensions within local labour markets and conflicts with other civilians in those communities.
- **War-women and their children are stigmatised and live at the social, economic and political margins in Uganda.** War-women and their children are frequently undocumented, 'unclaimed' and framed as posing short-term and long-term challenges to other local civilians, the Ugandan state and soldiers alike. Many soldiers discuss their attempts to introduce their new families to their relatives. However, this rarely succeeds due to a shortage of land or co-wives who do not accept the new family members. Furthermore, sometimes soldiers are unwilling to support children born in this context.

- **The Ugandan state is struggling to financially support women and their families living in these challenging circumstances.** Although the state originally subsidised the living costs of thousands of cross-border war-women and their children, Uganda is no longer able to support and to sustain the ever-increasing war-related populations. This is due to budget cuts for the defence ministry and broader national economic struggles.

Recommendations

Ugandan Peoples' Defence Force (UPDF)

- **Restructure military deployments and financial incentives for soldiers to shift to redistributive ways of peacebuilding.** Uganda has predominantly relied on a militaristic approach of resolving internal and external wars, which is supplemented and supported by the UN structures and international approaches to security. This approach is no longer sustainable, and more emphasis should be placed on peaceful means of conflict resolution with fewer missions, limiting military expenditure on the purchasing of arms, and greater emphasis on mediation.
- **Frequent and multiple soldier deployments must be minimised to mitigate the complex social and economic emergencies that come from soldiers starting 'temporary' families whilst on deployment.** For soldiers, minimising the frequency and length of missions will discourage them from forming multiple social relations. Further, shorter military deployments will positively impact soldiers' overall physical and mental well-being.

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We were a bridge... A bridge for ideas, how to communicate viewpoints from the vulnerable to the privileged and then relay back or suggest how to improve their situation. //

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Ugandan Government

- **Provide citizenship for cross-border war-women and their children.** Cross-border war-women and children need to be treated with dignity and as citizens, whether it means acquiring citizenship through their links with the military or as people enmeshed in wars created and perpetuated by the state.
- **Improving access to contraception and family planning services.** Cross-border war women living in complex emergencies do not have knowledge of and access to family planning services. These resources and support need to be made more accessible to this specific population.



To learn more about this research project and read its publications visit:
<https://thegenderhub.com/stories/cross-border-wars-sexuality-and-citizenship/>

This Project Profile was first published in the Hub's final report, *Gender, Justice and Security: Structural Challenges, Feminist Innovations and Radical Futures*. Go to www.TheGenderHub.com to read the full report and to learn more about all 38 research projects in the Hub.



This research is part of the UKRI GCRF Gender, Justice and Security Hub. The Hub is an interdisciplinary, transnational research network working with local and global civil society, practitioners, governments and international organisations to advance the delivery of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality; SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions; and the implementation of the UN Security Council's Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

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