

8-3-2016

Talking with Women about Community Healing in Uganda and Sierra Leone

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Recommended Citation

Jennifer Moore, *Talking with Women about Community Healing in Uganda and Sierra Leone*, IntLawGrrls Blog (2016).

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Talking with women about community healing in Uganda and Sierra Leone

By Jennifer Moore

IntLawGrrls
August 3, 2016

Dear Friends,

I last blogged with IntLawGrrls in [2012](#) about my book on transitional justice in Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Burundi (*Humanitarian Law in Action within Africa*, OUP 2012). I am now researching a second book that builds upon a vision of transformational justice with retributive, reconciliative, and redistributive strands, focusing on the perspectives of non-elite women engaged in grassroots peacebuilding work. I ask women what these concepts of justice mean to them, and whether they relate to their daily lives and involvement in community development activities.

In March I conducted focus group interviews in Sierra Leone, meeting with women in Moyamba and Koinadugu Districts. In two days I will fly to Kampala to start the Uganda phase of my research, entailing interviews with women civil war survivors in Gulu and Kitgum Districts of Northern Uganda. I wished to reach out to our network of women active in international law as I prepare to interact with networks of women in another region. I am grateful for the solidarity between women and men in so many places, whether elite or non-elite, whether we work in academia or in various conceptions of “the trenches,” whether we are friends, family, colleagues, or still strangers. Reflecting on the Brexit outcome in the UK on June 24; Trumpism as we in the US proceed towards November; and recent decisions on abortion, immigration and affirmative action by our Supreme Court – the strands of life are indeed starting to feel inter-connected.

My sister and her Irish husband, who live in London, recently shared a June 24 blog entitled “[Thoughts on the “Sociology of Brexit”](#)” by Will Davies. The piece resonated with me on several levels, including the connections between Brexit in the UK, on one side, to presidential politics in the US, on another, and finally with women’s community engagement on the African continent. Davies writes about the long-term impact of Thatcherism in the UK, and what he sees as the interplay between global neoliberal economic forces and post-1970s welfare policies of Labour government. He talks about the surprise of Labour politicians and others at the lack of political loyalty on the part of working people towards the political elites who “gave the handouts.”

Davies identifies a problem in the heartland that has something to do with a yearning for “*the dignity of being self-sufficient, not necessarily in a neoliberal sense, but*

certainly in a communal, familial and fraternal sense.” That idea of community self-sufficiency resonates with what my early research in Sierra Leone has already revealed. I have a growing sense that at least some rural women in post-conflict societies in Africa are empowered when they are organized and self-sufficient on a subsistence level, as much as when there are “pro-women” policies and political rhetoric at the national level. There is much to learn and to share on both sides of the Atlantic and across our various continents. I will hope to continue the conversation with as my research and your own projects continue.

28 June 2016

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