**Abstract Danse de Bondt**

**Breaking whose rules? Agency, power and serious games in rural Uganda**

In this paper I ethnographically explore the ways people navigate different (in)formal systems for dispute settlement at the village level in rural southwestern Uganda. These systems range from clan councils, local government councils to police mediation and magistrate courts in the district. I understand how the working of such semi-autonomous social fields (SASFs) (Moore 1973) set overlapping as well as conflicting rules for their members. Therefore, in navigating these different fields, breaking a rule is often inevitable. I specifically examine the ways people cope with such rule breaking situations and show how people use a combination of theatrical acts, (technical) language and “non-language” to justify and negotiate their positions (de Sousa Santos 1977). However, people do not have equal means at their disposal to pursue their goals, but rather are subjected to power dynamics and inequalities. I argue that Ortner’s serious games theory (1996;2006) sheds light on such questions of power and agency in the context of legal pluralism and can help to understand who may break a rule, how, why and in which situations. With such questions in mind, in this paper I describe those areas where rules are challenged and tensions arise between different competing SASF’s and show that such “boundary making practices” (Das and Poole 2004) are formative for the working of legitimacy, authority and power dynamics in the everyday life in rural Uganda.