

**Abduction, Rebellion and Reprieve:  
The Narratives of Former Members of the Lord's  
Resistance Army**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

A prominent feature of rebel insurgencies in Africa is the use of abduction to recruit fighters. This research investigates forced recruits who embrace the role of rebel within the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The study seeks to understand the motivations for abductees to stay and gain rank within the group that abducted them and by doing so illuminates the role that forced recruits play in the endurance and survival of armed groups that rely on abduction as a means of recruitment. The research was conducted through twenty interviews with former LRA soldiers during four months of fieldwork in northern Uganda. All participants had been recruited through abduction and have now taken up the Government amnesty and returned home.

The results demonstrate that the LRA retains its recruits through finely tuned internal control mechanisms. It uses the threat of violence and manipulates a cultural belief in spirits, which both prevent people from trying to escape. Contrary to the findings in previous research, the LRA does not terrorise their recruits into staying. The LRA gives rank when recruits demonstrate compliance and commitment. In turn, rank reaffirms commitment to the group. A recruit has to demonstrate ability, initiative, courage, and the ability to kill on the battlefield; in short, they have to show they are a good soldier. Those that are not good soldiers die during the fighting, or are killed by their own side. The benefits of rank are largely non-material: rank gives a recruit respect and power within the group, and the ability to 'marry,' all cultural conceptions of masculinity. Overall, forced recruits stay with the LRA because gaining rank offers them status that civilian life cannot, while internal control mechanisms in the group make leaving undesirable.

This research demonstrates that forced recruits are not traumatized into staying with armed groups, but rather are effectively initiated into becoming soldiers through processes that promote compliance and allegiance to the group. In conclusion, this project, by closely examining the phenomena of forced recruitment, sheds new light on the neglected issue of the role that forced recruits play in the endurance of illicit groups.

**Keywords:** Child soldiers; Lord's Resistance Army; abduction; armed groups; rebellion

## **Dedication**

To my family, for their unfailing support.

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## List of Acronyms

AFDL	Alliance des Forces Democratiques pour la Liberation du Congo (Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo)
APC	All People Congress
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
DP	Democratic Party
FARDC	Integrated Armed Forces
FEDEMU	Federal Democratic Movement
Frelimo	Frente de Libertação Moçambique (Mozambique Liberation Front)
FUMA	Former Uganda National Army
HSM	Holy Spirit Movement
HSMF	Holy Spirit Mobile Force
ICC	International Criminal Court
KY	<i>Kabaka Yekka</i> (the King Alone)
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MPLA	Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola)
NEC	National Executive Council
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NRA	National Resistance Army
RCM	Regimental Corporal Major
RENAMO	Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (Mozambican National Resistance)
RPG	Rocket Propelled Grenade
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
SWAY	Survey of War Affected Youth
SWW	Silent World War
TPDF	Tanzania People's Defence Force
UNITA	União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola)
UNLA	Uganda National Liberation Army
UNLF	Uganda National Liberation Front

UNRF	Uganda National Rescue Front
UPC	Uganda People's Congress
UPDA	Uganda People's Defence Army
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Force

## Glossary

Acholi	Tribe of the Acholi region (Gulu, Kitgum and Pader) in northern Uganda
<i>Ajwaka</i>	Spirit medium
Ankole	Kingdom in western Uganda.
Baganda	Tribe of the Buganda kingdom in central Uganda
Banyankole	Tribe of the Ankole kingdom in western Uganda
Buganda	Kingdom in central Uganda
Iteso	Tribe of the Teso region (Soroti, Kaberamaido and Katakwi) in eastern Uganda
<i>Jogi</i>	Spirits
<i>Kadogo</i>	Child soldiers
Kakwa	Tribe of the West Nile Region in north-western Uganda
<i>Kiroga</i>	Witchcraft
Kiswahili	Military language of Uganda (also spelt Swahili)
Langi	Tribe of the Langi region (Lira and Apac) region in northern Uganda
Luganda	Language of the Baganda people
Lwo	Language of the Acholi and Langi people
<i>Moyaa</i>	Shea butter oil
Muganda	Person from Baganda
<i>Muno</i>	White person
Munyankole	Person from Ankole
<i>Mzee</i>	Term of respect for an older man
Nebi	Prophet
<i>Otong-tong</i>	One who chops victims to pieces
Runyankole	Language of the Banyankole people
<i>Ting ting</i>	Pre-pubescent girl

# 1. Introduction

When Colonel Thomas Kwoyelo was led into Gulu High Court in July 2011, he became the first rebel of the notorious Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) to face justice for the reign of terror the group had inflicted over northern Uganda for the previous twenty-four years; a rebellion that has been characterised by sheer brutality – the abduction of children, the mutilation of civilians and the sexual enslavement of thousands of women. The irony was that Kwoyelo himself had been abducted by the LRA at the age of thirteen from his home in Amuru district in 1987. Two decades later, having been captured by the Ugandan army in the forests of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kwoyelo was tried for 53 counts of wilful killing, taking hostages, extensive destruction of property and causing serious bodily harm. His trial collapsed after he successfully applied for the amnesty that had been in place since 2000, but he remains in prison, neither convicted of war crimes, nor exonerated of them (Human Rights Watch, 7th July 2011; Lubwama, 18th August 2011).

Thomas Kwoyelo presents a paradox: an abductee who became a rebel. This research investigates forced recruits who embraced the role of a rebel within the LRA, to understand the motivations for abductees to stay and gain rank within the group that abducted them. It seeks to illuminate their role in the survival and endurance of rebel groups that rely on abduction as a means of recruitment. The research was conducted through in-depth interviews with twenty former members of the LRA during four months of fieldwork in Uganda.

This research seeks to understand the retention and advancement of forced recruits, and challenge the assumptions that forced recruits are indoctrinated or cowed into remaining with the LRA. While the act of abduction itself is a form of violence, the research demonstrates that, far from using a brutal means of indoctrination to gain compliance, the LRA in fact only uses violence

after abduction to eliminate unsuitable recruits and to punish transgressions. Prior research overlooks the agency required to ascend within an armed group, as well as the role these abductees are expected to play. They are abducted, after all, for no other reasons than to advance the aims of the LRA, and this requires trust and commitment to achieve a co-operative goal. The findings have implications both for the understanding of the LRA, and for the plethora of other rebel and insurgent movements that rely on forced recruitment.

Much has been written about the LRA, but little is known about them. The LRA are from the Acholi Tribe, hailing from northern Uganda, and have traditionally experienced marginalisation and exclusion in recent Ugandan history. The Acholi, along with other northern tribes, were economically underdeveloped when the British made Uganda a protectorate in 1894, but were favoured for recruitment into the uniform services. This prominent role in the army meant that they suffered the brunt of the ethnic violence that followed the struggles for power post-independence. The first – and to date, last – Acholi president was overthrown by the current Ugandan president, Yoweri Museveni, in 1986, and, fearing the retaliation that had characterised prior power transitions, the Acholi fled, and formed their own insurgency. Out of the various rebel groups that succeeded Museveni's victory came the Lord's Resistance Army, headed by Joseph Kony.

The LRA is notorious for brutal attacks on the civilian population. Failing to gain popular support or voluntary recruits, the LRA turned to abduction to get soldiers, enlisting Acholi children to their ranks against the children's will. It is estimated that 90% of the rebels are abductees (Moscardino et al., 2012; Talwar, 2004). The LRA has been described as a “self-replicating virus of violence” (UNODC, 2011, p.12), because of their peculiar practice of forced marriages between kidnapped women and commanders, which often results in pregnancy, thus creating a new generation of Acholi, born and raised in the bush, knowing nothing but war.

The LRA has endured over the past twenty-eight years despite the fact that it has no civilian support, appears to lack any political or ideological goals



beyond its own survival, has no natural resources in the region to fund the group, and its sole method of recruitment since 1994 has been abduction. Some have suggested that the group's goals are rooted in spiritual redemption, whereas others have claimed Kony is simply trying to overthrow the government, something that must have been complicated by the LRA's move out of Uganda in 2006. But this has not impeded its survival. The group has displayed remarkable resilience, surviving through a steady stream of desertion, repeated military campaigns and a blanket amnesty that gave an unconditional pardon to any rebel that abandoned the group.

The United Nations claims that the LRA "may be best described as criminals" (UNODC, 2011, p.12). Internationally, the leaders have been declared just that. Kony, although he has remained at large, has been indicted by the International Criminal Court for twenty-one counts of war crimes and twelve counts of crimes against humanity (ICC, 2005). Four of Kony's top commanders have been indicted alongside their leader: Vincent Otti, Okot Odhiambo, Dominic Ongwen and Raska Lukwiya. Lukwiya's arrest warrant has been subsequently terminated after his death was confirmed in 2006 (ICC, 2012). There are also rumours – which have not been substantiated to the Court's satisfaction – that Vincent Otti has been executed on Kony's orders and, more recently, Okot Odhiambo has been reportedly killed.

One of the other four commanders indicted with Kony, Major General Dominic Ongwen was, like Kwoyelo, forcibly recruited. Dominic Ongwen was abducted at the age of ten on his way to school, in 1990 (Justice and Reconciliation Project, 2008). In January 2015, he was finally captured in the Central African Republic, and sent to the International Criminal Court to face trial. The reason for Dominic Ongwen's rise through the ranks has been attributed to the fact he was a loyal fighter who killed, and that those in higher command positions kept dying, vacating command positions for him to fill (Baines, 2009). Although this may explain the circumstances that led to his promotion, it does not address his motivation for wanting to do so, or the organisational structure that allowed him – and not others – to rise. Previous research has attributed the retention of forced recruits to the fact that the LRA have successfully indoctrinated

the children they abduct. Violence is a key feature in initiation, as it breaks down psychological defences and makes it far harder to return to the community, for fear of ostracism and retribution (Blattman and Annan, 2010a). Haer, Banholzer and Ertl (2011) argue that the initiation rituals serve to control the recruits through fear, as well as bonding the abductees to the group and serving as a basis for learning the norms of the group.

As Dominic Ongwen and Thomas Kwoyelo demonstrate, some abductees do more than merely survive; they thrive within the LRA, and succeed in advancing within the ranks to command positions, where they commit the very atrocities of which they were a victim. A brutal and violent induction to the rebel group is incompatible with the subsequent loyalty displayed by the recruit staying with the LRA and advancing.

The research was conducted through interviews with twenty former rebels during four months of fieldwork in northern Uganda. The site for the research was the town of Gulu, located in the north, over 300km from the capital, Kampala. Gulu is the largest city in the north, and was the epicentre of LRA activity before they left Uganda in 2006. It also became the base for the government's counterinsurgency, and as such became the centre of the foreign aid and war economy in the region. More importantly, it's where the top commanders returned to when they left the LRA.

Through contacts in Kampala I was able to get access to what I have called the Establishment, which is where the top commanders stayed or 'hung out'. I also gained access to a local NGO who helped me contact lower ranking commanders. I interviewed twenty people in total. My sample was a purposive sample. The criteria for selection was that they had been recruited by abduction and had received a rank while in the LRA, but I was entirely reliant on my key contacts to locate suitable participants, and therefore sampling was out of my hands.

Of the twenty people interviewed, five had low or no rank, nine were mid-ranking, holding a position of second lieutenant or lieutenant, having advanced

from at least one lower rank, and six were high ranking. To protect their identity I have decided against revealing their ranks, but they were distinguishable as top commanders by the rank they had ascended to, which was verifiable through newspaper reports of their return, and by the fact that they had worked closely with the rebel leader, Joseph Kony, and had been part of the 'inner core' of the LRA. The age of abduction varied from nine years to thirty-five years, and length of time with the LRA varied from two years to twenty-four years. The Amnesty Act protected all of the participants, meaning that they cannot be prosecuted for any rebel activities that they participated in during their time with the LRA.

The sample has its limitations. As with most research on rebel group, access was a challenge, and I had to rely on gatekeepers to get both physical and social access to the participants. I had little control over whom I could recruit to participate – this was in the hands of the gatekeepers – and means that my sample was based on who the gatekeepers chose to ask or could get to talk to me. This, however, is an inherent limitation for research of this nature.

The veracity of what my participants told me is also a limitation, as I had very few avenues to verify their accounts. For example, none of the top commanders that I interviewed admitted that they had been involved in violence against civilians. They all steadfastly claimed that they had only participated in fighting with government soldiers. Given their rank, and what is known about the atrocities of the LRA, these assertions are questionable. The potential lack of honesty in the interviews is a limitation, although this is not unusual in research into deviant behaviour (e.g. see Tran, 2008).

The findings that emerged from the interviews demonstrate that violence and the spiritual beliefs of the groups serve as internal control mechanisms against deserting, but equally important to the retention of forced recruits are the allegiances that were formed by the recruits to each other and the group. The role of a rebel appeals to men who historically were employed as soldiers, and whose cultural definition of masculinity is tied to qualities of courage and bravery in battle. The British had made the Acholi a military people. Young Acholi men

continue this, by becoming rebels or government soldiers<sup>1</sup>. A man must command power and respect to be a 'real man'. The LRA also provides men with access to marriage, an institution that is highly respected, and which economic hardship could otherwise exclude them from, due to the inability to pay 'bride price'. Life in the bush was able to provide recruits with access to status that civilian life did not – or could not – give them.

Chapter One examines the explanations in the existing literature as to how and why armed groups have emerged in Africa, including the structural causes that have been credited with armed conflict, and the greed/grievance approach used to frame motivations for participating in rebellions. Chapter two examines the history of Uganda over the past 150 years, to explain the specific roots of the grievances, the exclusion and deprivation that the Acholi people experienced in both colonial and post-colonial times. The chapter discusses the ethnic conflict and reprisals that marked the struggles for power after independence. The background of the LRA is then explored in Chapter Three, from its inception as a successor movement to a spirit driven-rebellion of the Holy Spirit Movement to the series of peace talks and military campaigns that have marked the Government's counter-insurgency campaign, but have failed to eradicate the group. Chapter Four presents the conceptual framework of the research, examining religious cults and the phenomenon of charismatic authority. Chapter Five reviews the literature on the features of recruitment in rebel groups, comparing and contrasting the LRA to other rebel groups in the region, and identifying the gaps in the literature, specifically with regard to the failure to explain forced recruits who advanced and benefited from participating in rebellion for forced recruits.

The methods are presented in Chapter Six, and detail how this research was conducted, including how the data was collected and analysed and the research decisions I made along the way. I also discuss the issues I experienced in the field, and how they impact on the final results. The three main themes that emerged from the data are presented next. They are violence, the spirits, and

<sup>1</sup> Acholi have now been reintegrated back into the armed forces

allegiance. In the final chapter, I summarise my findings, address the implications of my research and suggest direction for future research.

## 2. Politics of Armed Rebellion

By 2000, half of African states were engaged in conflict (DFID, 2001). Researchers have attempted to uncover larger structural causes behind civil war in Africa. These structures include security, political economy and the legacy of colonialism. The legacy of colonialism underlies much of the political landscape in many nascent states, and historically violence has been the primary means to acquire power and to resolve conflict. Within East Africa, at least, violence has become a means to seize political power, resulting in former rebel leaders becoming political leaders: Uganda's President, Yoweri Museveni led the National Resistance Movement (NRM) in the 1980s bush wars, before overthrowing the transitional government in 1986; Paul Kagame, the President of Rwanda was the leader of the Rwanda Patriotic Front, the Tutsi guerrillas that overthrew the génocidaires, Congo's Laurent Kabila came to power after he overthrew Mobutu Sese Seko (with help from Rwanda and Uganda), and Salva Kiir, the President of South Sudan, fought on the side of the rebels in one of the longest civil wars in recent years (Carayannis, 2003). War and power have become intertwined, and it perhaps should not come as a surprise that revolutions and rebellions continue to be the means to affect political change (Clapham, 1998).

Colonialism has been attributed for creating of aggravating structural conditions that have led to war, not least because of the conflicts for independence. Blaming colonialism, however, overlooks the fact that most African nations have had a relatively trouble free transition to independence, even if they had had to fight to gain that independence (DFID, 2001). Ferguson (2002) has argued that colonialism impacts conflict because states are left unprepared or unready for self-government, because they lack the experience to do so.

While some wars have started as liberation movements, these wars have continued to be supported after independence by outside backers, as have been the case in Angola and Mozambique (both former Portuguese colonies), which suggests the causes stretch beyond removing colonial rule (Clapham, 1998). Struggles in southern Africa have focused on opposition white minority rule – in Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, although not in Botswana, and these struggles have not been the civil wars that have been experienced in other African nations. Colonialism may have helped shape the nature or cause of insurgent movements, but cannot explain why some nation experience war and others not, nor how these conflicts evolve or develop.

It has also been suggested that there is a contagion effect for conflict whereby states are more likely to succumb to civil war when their neighbours do (e.g. See Buhaug and Gleditsch, 2008), and this could be because of the ethnic links across borders. In places, colonialists created country borders where none naturally existed, thus separating tribes. For example, the Bakonzo of Uganda and the Banande of Congo were part of the same ethnic community before colonialism (Titeca and Vlassenroot, 2012). The overspill of war across borders has been attributed to the existence of these transitional ethnic groups – such as the murder and discrimination of the Congolese Tutsis, the Banyamulenge, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, when Hutu extremists came from Rwanda after the end of the genocide, and the ongoing struggle between Hutu and Tutsi rebels in eastern Congo (Carayannis, 2003).

Ethnic divides that has led to serious violence is a popular explanation for the outbreak of conflict in the continent, and yet it is only Rwanda and Burundi that have experienced systematic slaughter based upon ethnicity. Angola's UNITA rebels capitalised on racial divisions to gain support, but this was successful because of the lack of collective identity that than colonially imposed segregation (Ferguson, 2002).

These divides can be better explained by social and political inequality. In Rwanda, as with Sierra Leone and Liberia, economic and political power was the sole property of one group, which caused discord and discontentment with other

groups that were denied access to resources and benefits as a result. For example, mineral resources – specifically diamonds – have been a factor in the conflicts in Angola and Sierra Leone, although they have not been in Botswana. Indeed, Botswana has many of the structural factors present that have been used to explain conflict in other nations – mineral resources, decolonisation from white rule and ethnic divides between the eight officially recognised Tswana tribes and the 38 other tribes – and yet Botswana has not experienced conflict or instability since becoming independent (Nyati-Ramahobo, 2008). This has been attributed to the fact that Botswana did not have a military for ten years after gaining independence (Ntibinyane, 2012) but this explanation suggests that the sole determinant of conflict is the presence of a government army.

Generalisations about structural causes of conflict do not explain why insurgencies happen in some countries and not in others. Sharing a land mass does not mean that conflict has the same sources or causes. There is no one size fits all explanation of conflict in Africa. Attempting to create one means that the nuances and individual characteristics of each nation state have been overlooked. That is not to say there are not similarities that can be drawn between conflicts, but ignoring each country as an autonomous nation, with its own history, culture and politics, does little to advance our understanding of why conflict happens.

## **2.1. Motivation for War**

There are two main approaches in the existing literature to explain why people are motivated to rise up in rebellion. Economic civil war research tends to use a rational choice framework (Collier, 2000), and this tends to be an accepted explanation amongst policy makers (Mkandawire, 2002). This posits that rebels are fighting out of self-interest for personal gain, more interested in plundering than effecting change. This means rebellion is a kin to crime (Grossman, 1999). The other standard methods of analysing conflict, favoured within political science, is the 'greed-grievance' approach (Collie and Hoeffler, 2001; Vinci, 2005), which posits that rebels fight for money or ideology. Unlike within the



economic framework, rebellion is motive driven, based upon grievances. Sobek and Payne (2010) identified two categories of civil war: the first, where the rebel group seeks to replace the government, and the second where the rebels are addressing a grievance, and are seeking to address this, rather than overthrow the government. Collier and Hoeffler (1998) have found support for greed rather than grievance was associated with the onset of civil war. Le Billon (2001) disagrees, stating that greed motivation is too limiting, but some wars are motivated by a desire to control resources.

For example, it is estimated that 60% of the world's diamonds are in Sub-Saharan Africa, with the Democratic Republic of Congo accounting for 25% of the world's diamond reserves, and in turn this has been used to explain why the region is affected by conflict (Hummel, 2007; Le Billon, 2008). Diamonds have been accredited to civil wars in Sierra Leone, Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo – diamond mines in all three countries have been controlled by rebels during conflicts, but it is unclear whether diamonds create a greed motivation for war, or whether they merely provide a source of financing for rebels who are already engaged in rebellion (Le Billon, 2006).

There are three theoretical arguments of the impact of resources on civil war: firstly, the resource curse perspective, whereby a state becomes vulnerable to civil war, because it is dependant on the resource, which weakens the economy (Fearon, 2005; Le Billon 2001). There is evidence that resource-dependant countries perform economically worse than comparable countries with similar income levels, and this has been attributed to low income per capita, corruption and declining economic growth rate (Auly, 2001; Cramer, 2003). Secondly, there resource conflict perspective, which posits that grievances over who controls the resources leads to civil war, especially where there natural resources that are unequally allocated. Boix (2008) looked to the structural causes of civil war, and found that “political violence occurs in states in which assets are immobile and unequally distributed” (p.216). Income inequality can be attributed to start of RUF and Sierra Leonean civil war. In this instance, the government controlled the diamond mines, and yet there was mass unemployment amongst the youth, who decided to take up arms against the

government. At one point during the eleven-year civil war, the RUF controlled nine-tenths of Sierra Leone's diamond mines, making tens of millions of dollars as a result (Malamut, 2005). The result of relative deprivation, between what they expected to achieve and what they actually were able to achieve, or compared to what they see others achieving (Gurr, 1970; Regan and Norton, 2005). On the other hand, South Africa experiences massive income inequality, while producing \$1.6 billion in diamond revenue, yet has not experienced all out civil war (Hummel, 2007). Resources could also provide the opportunity to fund and sustain conflict, which is known as the conflict resources model (Le Billon, 2008). Ellis (2006) states that one of the causes of Liberia's first civil war, from 1990 to 1996, was access to resources, and a motivation for Liberia's involvement in Sierra Leone's civil war was access to their diamonds – when Sierra Leone was no longer able to sell non-government certified diamonds, these diamonds were smuggled into Liberia, and as a result, Liberia's production of diamonds increased by 162% (Hummel, 2007).

The presence of natural resources has been used to explain not just the onset of civil war, but also its endurance, and have characterised many recent civil wars. The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) fought against the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) in the civil war that lasted from 1975 until 2002, and relied on natural resources to fund their rebellion (Dunn, 2010). Diamonds have played a role in funding rebel groups in Angola, Sierra Leone and the Congo. Drugs also played a big role in Sierra Leone's civil war (Gates, 2002). There is a plethora of research linking resources to civil war (Sorens, 2011). Ross (2004) found that natural resources – specifically oil, gemstones and narcotics – made civil war more likely, suggesting that greed was a motivation for conflict. However, Fearon (2004) instead posited that resources, such as gemstones and drugs, make civil wars last longer, and so are related to endurance rather than onset. This means that resources merely provide a source of income to sustain the rebellion, rather than a reason to start fighting in the first place.

Resources are not necessary in and of themselves a predictor of conflict: Botswana is the largest producer of diamonds in Africa, and yet it has not

experienced civil war (Hummel, 2007). Likewise, resource deprived, cash-poor rebel groups still rise up in arms and maintain a rebellion, such as Renamo in Mozambique and the LRA in Uganda (Le Billion, 2006). Humphreys and Weinstein (2008) suggest that indicators of greed or grievance may actually be proxies for the susceptibility to be engaged in violence or to be politically manipulated, rather than causes for conflict.

Another resource for support for armed conflict comes from external patronage. Many rebel groups in Africa in recent times have been supported by foreign powers. States, for their part, choose to back rebel groups as a means to avoid direct conflict with other states (Salhyan, 2010). Foreign backers have funded many African conflicts: the Mozambican National Resistance, Renamo, was a proxy for foreign powers, during Mozambique's civil war. The Mozambique Liberation Front, Frelimo, had fought a ten-year battle for independence from Portugal, which it finally won in 1975. Rhodesia then organised, trained and armed former Frelimo soldiers, who now made up Renamo, to fight against Frelimo, to ensure that the newly independent Mozambique would not destabilise Rhodesia. South Africa offered its support after Rhodesia became Zimbabwe in 1980, when Mugabe's regime ceased to support Renamo (Boothby et al., 2006). Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front was formed by former Sierra Leonean Army corporal Foday Sankoh and was backed by Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), and aimed to overthrow the government – Joseph Momoh's All People Congress (APC) (Denov and Gervais, 2007; Park, 2006).

Rwanda funded Laurent Kabila's Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (ADFL) in the hope of establishing a pro-Rwanda regime in Zaire, which turned out not to be the case, with Kabila instead choosing to arm Rwandan insurgents. External support prolongs civil war, because it provides resources, financing and training (Elbadawi and Sabanis, 2000). Economic endowments also serve to strengthen a rebel group relative to the government (Weinstein, 2005). But reliance on a state as a backer makes rebels vulnerable to abandonment, meaning they may be more willing to negotiate if they are

abandoned, or makes them more vulnerable to being repressed by the state (Salhyan, 2010).

Prior research has argued that weak states are more likely to deal with rebellions. This is because they are less able to see off potential challengers (Buhad, 2006), and strong states tend not to suffer from rebellions – although they do, as Collier (2000) points out, deal with violent crime. Like criminals, rebels use illegitimate means to attain socially valued goals, such as wealth, status or power (Merton, 1938). Francis (2005), for example, argues that weak states are breeding grounds for civil militias – and thus war. However, this overlooks the fact that the government is what is being fought over (Ferguson, 2002).

The way in which the government is organised can also impact the likelihood of conflict. In Liberia, a centralised government meant that the local levels of informal social control – the local chiefs – were undermined and these local chiefs were unable to impose order, which in turn undermined the central government's ability to impose order (Ellis, 2006). Political violence is not necessarily just a means to overthrow the government; it also acts to challenge the government (Toros, 2012). Yet violence is not the primary means in which people express grievances (Victoroff and Adelman, 2012).

The expectation that there are common causes and motivation for conflict within Africa is in part due to the fact that many civil wars start to look the same, because of the growing use of guerrilla warfare tactics. These are characterised by small, decentralised units that are highly mobile, hit-and-run tactics, rather than head-on battle, a lack of territory of their own and a reliance on the civilian population for supplies, whether it be food or fighters (Weinstein, 2006). Tools of fear and intimidation in guerrilla warfare are essential – targeting civilians instils fear in the population, and also sends the message that the government is unable to protect them (Hoffman, 2004).

Kaldor (1999) has identified the difference nature of civil war post the Cold War era as 'new wars', which are characterised by guerrilla tactics of not facing the enemy head on and counter-insurgency tactics involving hate and fear instead

of winning hearts and minds, they lack popular support and violence is used gratuitously. 'New wars' paradigm are marked by: "a tendency to be fought within states, the presence of non-state actors (NSAs) on one or more sides, excessive violence against civilians, and a general low level of technology and formal organisation of forces" (Vinci, 2005, p.361) – but tend to lack political goals. They are often considered to be criminal as opposed to political. New civil war use techniques of destabilisation, aimed at creating fear. Kalyvas (2001) has challenged whether these distinction are based on a meaningful characterisation of the changing nature of civil war, or whether they just mark a difference between pre and post cold war era conflicts. Instead, civil war could have changed in their tactics because competing superpowers were no longer backing intrastate conflicts, meaning local resources had to be utilised.

But it is erroneous to assume that the causes and precursors to these wars are also the same, or that generalisations can be made about African wars. These nations share geographical proximity, but the factors that shaped and developed countries before, during and after colonialism means that they cannot be lumped together to a single explanation of 'African' wars. These generalisations do not explain why insurgencies happen in some countries and not others, and cannot explain the distinctive aspects of each case.

### **3. History**

To understand the LRA, it is important to first understand the root causes of the conflict in northern Uganda that spawned the Lord's Resistance Army. The ethnic, cultural, religious and economic divides can be traced back to pre-colonial times; when Uganda became a British protectorate in 1894, these divides were fostered and exploited. Ugandans gained independence in 1962 through decolonisation, but were ill prepared to govern as a united country, which led to a succession of increasingly bloody struggles for power, before the current president, Yoweri Museveni, a former guerrilla who hailed from western Uganda, took over. But peace in the north has still proved to be elusive.

Prior to the arrival of the British in 1894, the land that is now Uganda consisted of four kingdoms, Buganda, Ankole, Toro and, Bunyoro, one territory, Busoga, and ten districts: Acholi, Bugisu, Bukedi, Karamoja, Kigezi, Lango, Medi, Sebei, Teso and West Nile (Mutibwa, 1992). The kingdoms were all located in the south of the country, while the districts were to the north. The main divide that existed prior to colonialism was between the north and the south, with the river Nile acting as physical divide between the two sides. The geographical divider also marked differences between ethnic groups, language, political systems and economies. The north was made up of Nilotic and Sudanic ethnic groups, while the southerners were Bantus. These ethnic groups consist of fifty-six tribes, who speak forty different languages. The south had centralised political systems, while the north had tribal systems of governance (Mutibwa, 1992). The south also had more developed economies than the north (Mittleman, 1975).

As such, there was little uniting the north and the south of what is now Uganda, but the British sought to amalgamate the different kingdoms, districts, tribes and political systems into a single country. Britain declared a protectorate in 1894, after the arrival of both Protestant and Catholic missionaries in 1877 and

1888 had led to further conflict, religious divisions and eventually civil war in the Buganda – the largest kingdom (Mutibwa, 1992). Buganda is located in the centre of Uganda, and the British then sought to establish rule in territories outside Buganda, with the help of the Baganda<sup>2</sup>, who were rewarded with preferential treatment (Mutibwa, 1992). The *Buganda Agreement* of 1900 put the Baganda under British rule, but they were ruled through their own institutions (Kasozi, 1994). Similar agreements were concluded with the three other kingdoms, but none gave them the same status as the Baganda enjoyed with their *Agreement* (Ofcansky, 1996).

The different tribes in what has become Uganda did not necessarily self-identify as distinct groups – but it suited the colonists to divide them up along those lines, because it made administration easier: “thus, in part, tribal identity is a colonially induced phenomenon” (Mittelman, 1975, p.31). For example, the Acholi were created in 1937 through an ordinance amalgamating the districts of Chua and Gulu – prior to that, they had been known by their clan only (Mutibwa, 1992). Instead of unifying a country that they had formed, by creating these tribal labels, the British in fact helped to foster the divides along which much post-independence violence was based.

There are four main indigenous language groups in Uganda, and forty different languages – some of which are mutually intelligible – but the lack of a common language has been a barrier to integration (Kasozi, 1994). Luganda, the language of the Baganda, is the most widely spoken of the indigenous Ugandan languages, but its use outside Buganda as the language of administration during colonial times caused much resentment (Mittelman, 1975). English became the official language at independence, but only those who have received an education are able to speak it (Kasozi, 1994). There is no local language that would be acceptable to the majority of the population (Mittleman, 1975). Idi Amin did attempt to introduce Kiswahili as the national language in 1973, and while it has remained the working language of the military in Uganda, it was viewed as a language of coastal countries, and therefore seen as Islamic (Mittleman, 1975).

<sup>2</sup> The Baganda (single: Muganda) are the people of the Buganda kingdom

Religion, too, has proven a divisive issue. The Baganda were first exposed to Islam by the Arab traders in 1844. The Northerners had likewise been introduced to Islam through the arrival of Sudanese, Turkish and Egyptian traders a decade earlier (Kasozi, 1994). The traders did not propagate their faith, which served to facilitate its acceptance and spread. But the arrival of Christian missionaries in the 1870s, whose aim was to convert the local population, brought contention. The Anglicans came in 1877 at the invitation of the Kabaka (king) of Buganda, followed closely a year later by rival French Catholic missionaries. This led to civil war in Buganda between the Catholics and Protestants. The British intervened, and subsequently favoured the Protestants, who were the minority (Ofcansky, 1996).

The British exploited these cleaves within Uganda, instigating a policy of 'divide and rule' in order to overcome resistance to colonial rule (Ofcansky, 1996). This is a familiar tactic that the British employed throughout their colonies. For example, the Baganda were disarmed in 1905 – the British then told them that they were not tall enough to be part of the army or the police force, setting the height requirement to join at 5 feet 7 inches, which excluded most Baganda. The British claimed that southerners could not fight (Kasozi, 1994; Mutibwa, 1992; Ocaya-Lakidi, 1977). In fact, the British did not want them to have military power, as it was a threat to British rule, so instead they gave army positions to Northerners. The Acholi especially were heavily recruited by the British for uniform service – the military, police and correctional services – and the British colonial regiment, named the King's African Rifles mainly recruited from the Acholi (Gersony, 1997). Thus, colonial rulers created an army of northerners. The army therefore came to be considered a profession for the uneducated. This was problematic, as the army needed educated people to provide effective leadership; but the army, police force and correctional services were made up of recruits from "societies which were backward in education and economic development" (Mutibwa, 1992, p.6). While using uneducated people for these positions meant that they could be controlled, this caused problems at independence, because there were no suitable Ugandans to lead the army after



the British officers departed, and unqualified soldiers were promoted to ranks they otherwise could not have attained (Mutibwa, 1992).

Britain also helped to undermine Ugandans' position in their own economy, by bringing in Asians to fulfil the role of skilled workers that the indigenous population could not fill. The Asians, unable to purchase land, became traders, which created a middle class (Mittelman 1975). These Asian immigrants also began to dominate trade, acting as go between for Europeans and Africans. This disadvantaged the locals, which lead to resentment (Mutibwa, 1992).

Uganda was set to gain her independence from the British in 1962. Demonstrating the lack of unity within the nation, the kingdom of Buganda sought its own independence, separate from the rest of the country, in 1960. The bid failed, but caused a lot of contention within Uganda, that Buganda had not tried to gain independence as a part of the whole country, choosing instead to go it alone. In fact, the Baganda did not want to lose the special status they had enjoyed under colonial rule (Mutibwa, 1992; Ofcansky, 1994). No efforts were made for the different regions to make contact with one another or to become unified before independence (Mutibwa, 1992).

In preparation for independence, the Independence Constitution was drawn up in 1962, the result of mutually agreed upon negotiations between different regions. The constitution granted full federal status to the kingdom of Buganda and semi-federal status to the other kingdoms, but the districts were to be ruled in a unitary fashion from the capital, Kampala, which is located in Buganda (Mutibwa, 1992). General elections were held for a new independent government in 1962. Initially, there were two political parties competing, a Baganda led Democratic Party and the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) led by a northern Langi, called Milton Obote. Then, the Kabaka of Buganda, Sir Edward Mutesa II, created his own political movement, called Kabaka Yekka (the King Alone, or KY). The KY formed a purely convenience based alliance with Obote's UPC party, despite sharing none of the same political goals or agenda, and they managed to win a majority of the seats against the Democratic Party at the

elections in April 1962. This alliance helped them to win, but the lack of political unity between the two parties was to prove deeply problematic. Obote became Prime Minister, while the Kabaka became President of Uganda – a ceremonial role – and led Uganda into independence on 9th October 1962 (Mutibwa, 1992).

Post-independence was marred by coups and rebellions, where violence was the norm for seizing power, and each new regime would seek revenge on the remnants of the previous government, and their tribe.<sup>3</sup> Six of the eight post-independence presidents seized power by overthrowing the previous regime (Quinn, 2004). The conditions that allowed people to exploit and seize power were already in place when Uganda attained her independence. When the British left, northerners were now the leaders of the country, both in the government and the military – but had neither the training nor the education to lead in either (Mutibwa, 1992). But it is important to note that the British left Uganda with a northern leader in charge, despite the fact that they had favoured the southerners.

Initially, Obote focused on placating the Baganda – it was in Buganda, after all, that the administrative capital, Entebbe, and the commercial capital, Kampala lay. He assigned four cabinet positions to KY members, accepted the federal status of Buganda and married a Muganda woman (Ofcansky, 1996). But this, and the Kabaka of Buganda becoming President – however ceremonial the role was – did little to unite Uganda. The coalition between the KY and UPC had been purely for convenience: neither party could have gained political power without the other. But the coalition disintegrated in 1964 over the ‘lost counties’ issue. In 1894, the British had given the Baganda almost a quarter of Bunyoro’s territory to reward them for helping to defeat the ruler of Bunyoro, who was frustrating British interest in the region. Bunyoro had tried ever since to regain the countries. So in 1964 there was a referendum as to whether these counties remained part of Buganda or returned to being part of Bunyoro. The vote was overwhelmingly for the latter, much to the fury of the Baganda and the Kabaka.

<sup>3</sup> It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the nature of domestic politics or political economy, but this topic has been written on extensively elsewhere, including Francis (2006) and Jackson and Rosberg (1982).

This led to the collapse of the alliance between the UPC and KY (Ofcansky, 1996; Setfel, 1994). Two years later, in 1966, a Munyankole<sup>4</sup> cabinet minister, Grace Ibingira, accused Obote, his deputy army commander, Idi Amin, and two cabinet ministers, Adoko Nekyon and Felix Onama, of corruption, claiming they were involved in the smuggling of ivory and gold from Congo-Leopoldville<sup>5</sup> (Ofcansky, 1996). Obote responded by arresting Grace Ibingira and four other cabinet ministers and promoting Amin to Army Chief of State. He then created a new constitution, abolished the position of president and vice president, and assumed all executive powers himself. Obote next used the army – Amin in particular – to force a new constitution through the National Assembly. The Baganda rejected Obote's new constitution and asked for foreign military aid, so Obote declared a state of emergency and attacked the Kabaka's palace at Mengo Hill in Kampala, slaughtering 2,000 Baganda. The Kabaka fled to Britain, where he died three years later (Mutibwa, 1992; Ofcansky, 1996). Obote had started a dangerous trend of using violence to solve a political issue: "between May 1966 and January 1971 the country had a civilian administration which used military means to implement its politics" (Mutibwa, 1992, p.64).

Obote then sought to consolidate his power. In September 1967 he introduced a new Constitution, which centralised power and abolished the kingdoms, making Uganda a republic (Setfel, 1994). Two years later, after a failed assassination attempt, he made Uganda a one-party state, banning all political opposition (Ofcansky, 1996).

Having no strong political base, Obote instead built up the army under Idi Amin. By 1971, the army consisted of 9,000 men, and over a third were Acholi (Mutibwa, 1992). Amin and Obote had been very close, and Obote had relied on him to enforce his rule. But when Amin became commander of the army, he began eliminating rivals and promoting those loyal to him, which caused a rift with Obote. Amin was given a lateral promotion to Chief of Defence Forces, making him a mere figurehead, allegedly with the view to removing him from the armed

<sup>4</sup> From Ankole kingdom in Western Uganda

<sup>5</sup> Now called the Democratic Republic of Congo

forces altogether (Mutibwa, 1992; Ofcansky, 1996). When Obote left for Singapore to attend a conference in January 1971, he demanded that on his return, Amin explain a deficit in the administration of the army (Kazosi, 1994). While he was gone, Amin staged a coup, and overthrew Obote.

Idi Amin was a Muslim and a Kakwa – a Sudanese tribe – from the West Nile region of the country, which borders Sudan. He had completed only two years of primary school education and, in 1946, had joined the King's African Rifles, where he learned to speak English. At independence, he had been promoted to the rank of captain – a position he would not otherwise have obtained had it not been for the fact that there were no educated Africans in the army to replace the departing British commanders (Mutibwa, 1992).

Amin met with exuberance when he overthrew Obote, not because he had any particular popular support, but because Obote had absolutely none. People were just glad that Obote was gone (Kasozi, 1994). Amin initially promised free and fair elections after the security situation in the country had been stabilised, but then declared himself president one week after seizing power, on 2nd February 1971 (Mutibwa, 1992; Setfel, 1994). Amin's first move after coming to power was designed to curry favour, especially with the Baganda. He released Obote's political prisoners, and had the Kabaka's body flown back from the UK – where he had died in exile – to be buried in Buganda. Nevertheless, Amin's power was vulnerable and unstable, and although the Acholi had not necessarily been loyal to Obote – they too had been overlooked for promotion in favour of Obote's fellow Langi – Amin feared that they were not loyal to him either, and were more likely to support their neighbouring Langi. So, during the first twenty months of his regime, he called Acholi and Langi soldiers to report to their barracks, where his men slaughtered them mercilessly. Amin then changed the composition of the army to Sudanic speaking West Nilers – his own people – in a move to consolidate his power (Mutibwa, 1992).

In September 1972, Obote launched an ill-conceived, badly planned and poorly executed invasion from his exile in Tanzania, which failed. But it did succeed in inspiring violence from Amin, who no longer tried to cover up the

atrocities he committed: executions were held in public and the bodies of the murdered were left out on the street (Setfel, 1994). Amin came into power through violence, so it was inevitable he would use violence to hold on to power. Amin was a soldier, not a politician, and he knew no other way to gain or maintain power.

In 1972, “to deflect public criticism and to enhance his domestic support, Amin adopted a controversial but highly popular program to Africanise the economy” (Ofcansky, 1996, p.44), in the form of an ‘Economic War’, which commenced with the expulsion of the Asians. There was great animosity towards Asians in Uganda, not just because of their economic success, which had come at the expense of Africans, but also because they refused to integrate into Ugandan society. Asians were also very wealthy, and by expelling 50,000 (half of whom were Ugandan citizens), Amin was able to seize their assets and wealth to deal with the dire state of the Ugandan economy. Amin’s Economic War also included nationalising British interests in Uganda. Amin’s policy ruined the economy, but it did give Ugandans control of their economy by ousting foreigners (Mutibwa, 1992).

An unsuccessful coup led by Amin’s fellow Kakwas in 1973 came as an unpleasant shock to Amin, who had thought he could rely on his own tribesmen to be loyal, so he began killing anyone he feared was working against him. Thus began his increasingly brutal reign of terror, which left hundreds of thousands dead. Amin became increasingly paranoid, not without reason, after several attempted assassinations, plots and mutinies. In January 1976, he eliminated all remaining Acholi and Langi soldiers from the army, killing well over 1,000 (Setfel, 1994). Finally, on 14th November 1978, Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere sent the Tanzanian People’s Defence Force (TPDF), along with 1,000 pro-Obote Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) soldiers, into southern Uganda. By 10th April 1979, they had captured Kampala (Ofcansky, 1996). Amin fled to Libya, and then to Saudi Arabia, where he eventually died in poverty.

Three different governments succeeded Amin, but they lasted collectively nineteen months (Quinn, 2004). After Amin’s overthrow, there were three interim

presidents – Yusuf Lule, Godfrey Lukongwa Binaisa and Paulo Muwanga, before a highly suspect election brought Obote back into power. At first, after the Tanzanian victory, the National Consultative Council acted as Parliament, while the National Executive Council (NEC) acted as the cabinet. They elected a Muganda, Yusuf Lule, as the Chairman of the NEC, making him by default the President of Uganda. He lasted 68 days (Mutibwa, 1992). Godfrey Lukongwa Binaisa, who had been part of Obote's government in the 1960s, replaced Lule. Like Lule, he was a Muganda. Binaisa was elected by the National Consultative Commission, which was then the supreme governing body of the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF). The military wing of the UNLF was the Uganda National Liberation Army, and they became the country's army in 1979 (Mitubwa, 1992). They were largely Acholi, constituting around thirty to forty percent of the army (Gersony, 1997).

The Military Council removed Binaisa after eleven months, on 12th May 1980. Next, Paulo Muwanga took over until the elections. Elections were finally held in December 1980, but they were clearly rigged, and the much-hated Obote returned to power. Yoweri Museveni – a Munyankole from Western Uganda, who had been part of the post-Amin interim government of Yusuf Lule – stood with his party, the Uganda Patriotic Movement in the 1980 elections. In response to Obote's questionable election victory, Museveni established the National Resistance Army (NRA) during 1981, and began an anti-government insurgency (Gersony, 1997).

After Obote returned to power, fighting between his UNLA troops and Museveni's National Resistance Army mainly occurred in the Luwero Triangle, a part of Buganda 75km north of Kampala, between three lakes, Victoria, Albert and Kyoga. The conflict was characterised by brutal massacres, mainly perpetrated by the government forces (Lomo and Hovil, 2004). The NRA on the other hand relied on civilian support, so were generally disciplined (Weinstein, 2007). Unable to defeat the NRA, the UNLA wreaked revenge on the civilian population, carrying out massacres, abductions, looting and mass starvation. In January 1983, for example, Obote launched Operation Bonanza against the NRA in Luwero district, and the UNLA soldiers destroyed villages and small towns, and murdered

thousands of civilians. At least 300,000 people died (Ofcansky, 1996). Amin at least controlled his soldiers, and they committed atrocities on his orders, but the UNLA soldiers perpetrated them of their own accord (Mutibwa, 1992). Obote mainly sent Acholi soldiers to fight Museveni's guerrillas – the Langi soldiers were kept safely away from the war zone (Mutibwa, 1992). On top of being sent into the firing line instead of the Langi, the Acholi also felt that they were being marginalised and overlooked for promotion in favour of Obote's tribesmen. When the Army Chief of Staff, David Oyite-Ojok, died in 1983, Obote overlooked the obvious candidate to replace him, an Acholi called Bazilio Okello, in favour of a Langi (Mutibwa, 1992). By 1984, 71-year-old General Tito Lutwa Okello was the only Acholi in a key position in Obote's army (Ofcansky, 1996).

Obote had sought to regain the power he had lost at the hands of his own army in 1971, even though he had neither the political capability nor the popular support needed to take the presidency. He came back to power relying on the support of Tanzania to return to Uganda and took the presidency through undemocratic means. Having not learnt from his mistakes the first time round, Obote was once again overthrown in a coup orchestrated by his own army commanders.

The discontented Acholi element in the Army finally overthrew Obote in July 1985 – led by General Basilio Olara-Okello, and General Tito Okello Lutwa<sup>6</sup> took over as President. The new President invited other anti-Obote forces to join the government, and the Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF), made up of exiled Amin soldiers, the Former Uganda National Army (FUMA), and the Federal Democratic Movement (FEDEMU) did so. Museveni and the NRA were unwilling to partake in the new government; they still considered the Okellos to be remnants of the Obote regime, because of the atrocities that they had committed under him (Mutibwa, 1992). But unlike Obote, the Okellos saw the wisdom in trying to negotiate with the NRA. President Moi of Kenya mediated a power sharing agreement between the Okello government and the NRA, which

<sup>6</sup> The two are not related – Okello is a name that means 'born after twins' in Lwo.

cumulated in the Nairobi Agreement, signed in December 1985, after four months of negotiation. This agreement created a 17 member military council to govern the country, seven of which would be NRA members, and Museveni would take the role of Vice Chairman under Okello. The army was to be reconstituted, with 44% coming from the UNLA forces, largely of northern composition, and 42% from the NRA, who were largely Banyankole and Baganda (Gersony, 1997). Okello and Museveni signed the Nairobi Agreement on 17th December 1985. Forty days later, the NRA entered Kampala, and deposed Okello (Mutibwa, 1992).

Yoweri Museveni became Uganda's eighth President on 29th January 1986. Museveni was the first guerrilla insurgent in the region to overthrow a government, following a long legacy of using military means for gaining political power. After his victory, the Acholi elements of the UNLA retreated north, fearing revenge for the atrocities they had carried out against the NRA in the Luwero Triangle. The NRA gained military control of the northern districts of Gulu and Kitgum by March 1986. They did not attack the civilian population, as feared (Gersony, 1997). But in August 1986, all UNLA soldiers were ordered to report to barracks. This was reminiscent of the call to the barracks by Idi Amin in 1972, when the Acholi and Langi soldiers were massacred and, fearing that history was about to repeat itself, some Acholi fled to Sudan. There, they joined the Uganda People's Defence Army (UPDA), a rebel group that had been founded in Juba in May 1986, as a successor to the UNLA (Behrend, 1999a). The NRA responded by brutally killing suspected collaborators, beating and detaining people, and destroying granaries (Gersony, 1997).

Museveni initially sought to put down the rebellion in the north through military means but, in June 1988, Museveni offered amnesty to former combatants in the Gulu Peace Accord, which succeeded in bringing a large number of UPDA soldiers out of the bush (Lomo and Hovil, 2004). Museveni has faced 22 armed insurgencies during his time in power (Justice and Reconciliation Project, 2008).



The south – especially the Baganda – had benefited exponentially from British favouritism during colonial rule, at the expense of the already underdeveloped north. But post-independence, it was the disadvantaged northerners who had both political and military power – not the more privileged, better-educated or more economically advanced south. Given the tensions and the divides between the north and the south, this was a recipe for disaster. With northerners in political power, Obote was able to use the military to consolidate and enforce his power – until the military tried to take political power. Power was a way to secure economic benefit, and it was the military that became the “ultimate arbitrator of power” (Setfel, 1994, p.255) in Uganda.

The divides within the country remain, with the south still more developed, and more economically advanced, whereas progress in the north has been choked by a civil war that has lasted for over a quarter of a decade. The ethnic divisions in the country have led to the war in the north and the LRA being as labelled as an ‘Acholi problem’ as if it is something peculiar to the Acholi people and thus does not concern the rest of Uganda (Lomo and Hovil, 2004). The legacy of the Acholi being drafted into the army under the British has been that they are seen as militaristic (Dolan, 2005).

The main root causes for the ongoing conflict in the north of Uganda, and the creation of the Lord’s Resistance Army can be attributed to the ethnic divides between the north and the south. These divides existed prior to the arrival of the British, and were exacerbated upon independence. These have led to the political exclusion and economic inequality for the northern tribes, specifically the Acholi. But ethnic divides and the legacy of colonialism cannot alone explain the LRA rebellion. The Acholi were not the only tribe to experience disadvantage through colonialism, nor is the LRA the only rebel group that rose up against Museveni regime, but it is the complexities of Uganda’s particular path through colonialism and independence that can explain how the LRA came to be.

## 4. The Lord's Resistance Army

In the wake of Museveni's victory over the Okello government in 1986, the soldiers of the defeated UNLA fled north. The return of the Acholi UNLA soldiers to their homes caused discord within their community. For the Acholi, there is an ingrained belief in witchcraft (*kiroga*). They saw death – even by an enemy bullet or a disease like AIDS – as the result of a curse. Traditionally, Acholi soldiers would go through a cleansing ceremony on their return from war, in order to purify them from what they did in battle. If they were not cleansed, the Acholi believed that the soldiers would bring *cen* with them back into the community. *Cen* is the spiritual pollution of the un-reconciled spirits of those who had died by violence (Allen and Schomerus, 2006; Behrend, 1999a). But the returning UNLA soldiers did not want to be cleansed; the soldiers did not want to admit to the violence and destruction they wrought against the civilian population in Luwero. A large number of the perpetrators of the atrocities in Luwero were Acholi, as it was them Obote had sent to fight Museveni's men, and it is the Acholi who were blamed by the civilian population. The Acholi, in turn, believed that the spirits of those they murdered haunted them in revenge (Gersony, 1997). When the UNLA soldiers retreated, the Acholi Elders blamed the returning soldiers for causing disease and death amongst the Acholi people, believing that the soldiers had become polluted, and had brought this pollution with them into the community (Behrend, 1999a).

Faced with rejection from their communities, and the fear of retaliation from Museveni's NRA troops, many former UNLA soldiers retreated to Sudan and formed the Uganda People's Defence Army (UPDA). Odong Latek, who later joined the LRA, led the UPDA. The rise of the UPDA has also been attributed to the former UNLA soldiers being unwilling or unable to settle back into civilian life as farmers, because the plundering and looting they had participated in as soldiers meant that they had experienced the 'high life' (Behrend, 1999a). Or these former soldiers simply had no other skills, which is why, Van Acker (2004)

suggests, they had no choice but to join a rebel army – it was their only marketable skill. They could no longer join the government's armed forces, which had traditionally been their career of choice, so they joined a rebel group instead (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999; Jackson, 2002). Recycling their tactics from their days in the UNLA, the UPDA soldiers used violence and terror against the civilian population (Behrend, 1999a).

It was against this backdrop that a twenty-eight years old spirit medium<sup>7</sup>, Alice Auma, created the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM), which was the precursor to the Lord's Resistance Army. On 25th May 1985, the spirit of an Italian captain called Lakwena, who had died in Uganda during World War II, allegedly took over Alice, and she became known as Alice Lakwena. Initially, the spirit Lakwena told Alice to heal, but in August 1986 he told her to create the Holy Spirit Movement, and its military wing, the Holy Spirit Mobile Forces (HSMF). Alice gained recruits from among the Acholi peasantry, and began to mobilise support from the UPDA. After initial rebuttals, she eventually managed to recruit 150 UPDA soldiers. Unlike its successor, the HSM was not just limited to the Acholi, and became an inter-ethnic movement, although they believed that God sent the spirit Lakwena specifically to the Acholi as they were so sinful. Alice promised to purify the Acholi, especially for the atrocities committed by UNLA soldiers during the bush wars in the Luwero triangle (Behrend, 1999a; Gersony, 1997).

Meanwhile, the government, through the NRA commander Salim Saleh, the brother of Museveni, began negotiations with the UPDA in June 1987. This led to the Gulu Peace Accord in June 1988, which gave amnesty to former combatants, and successfully brought most of the UPDA out of the bush (Gersony, 1997; Lomo and Hovil, 2004). About 8,000 rebels took up the amnesty, and this marked the end of the UPDA (Allen, 1991). Some of the former UPDA soldiers chose, however, to join the LRA (Behrend, 1999a).

The spirit Lakwena, through Alice, drew up 20 Holy Spirit Safety Precautions, which were to be followed by all HSM members, and were designed

<sup>7</sup> A spirit medium is someone through whom spirits speak.

to restore moral order. A failure to follow these Precautions would result in death or injury in battle, as they believed that death was the punishment for sin. The spirit Lakwena, through Alice, also created an initiation ritual, which involved smearing shea butter oil (*moyaa*) in the shape of a cross over the torso of soldiers. Alice claimed that the shea butter oil would cause bullets to bounce harmlessly off them and, despite much evidence to the contrary, the HSM soldiers believed her, and would march into battle half naked, covered in shea butter oil, singing hymns and not making any effort to take cover (Allen, 1991; Behrend, 1999a). Those who did die in battle – and there were many – Alice claimed were sinful, or had violated the Holy Spirit Safety Precautions, and thus had been killed in divine retribution. It was believed that the spirits would direct the enemy's bullet to the sinners (Behrend, 1999a).

Lakwena was far from the only spirit of the HSM; there were thousands more that spoke through Alice, although Lakwena was the main one. In total, the number of spirits far outnumbered the HSM soldiers, with 140,000 spirits, compared to 5,000 to 7,000 humans. To outsiders, Alice was the leader of the HSM, but to insiders, the leaders were the spirits, in particular Lakwena. Alice served only as a medium through which the spirits would speak. It was the spirits, not the possessed person, who was the active power, but the medium did have power as a result of the possession. The soldiers did not know when it was the spirit speaking through Alice, or when it was Alice speaking for herself, giving Alice control over what information was relayed to the soldiers, and whether it came from her mouth or the spirits' (Behrend, 1999a).

In November and December 1986, Alice's HSM had two victories in her first attacks. These took place in Kilak Corner and Pajule – both in southern Kitgum – where the NRA soldiers were taken by surprise and fled. She gained a lot of popular support amongst the civilian population as a result of these victories. But in 1987, the powers of shea butter oil finally proved inferior to modern artillery fire and the HSM met with defeat at Jinja, 82km from the capital, suffering heavy losses (Gersony, 1997).

The spiritual aspect of the HSM had given Alice's war legitimacy. It built upon the existing beliefs of the Acholi in witchcraft and spiritual possession, and incorporated Christian beliefs. Alice offered the Acholi a way out from despair and desperation through redemption after the overthrow of the Acholi government, and the return of the UNLA soldiers (Jackson, 2009). Her purification rituals were seen to cleanse the Acholi of their sin, and for those who still died or were injured in battle, it was a sign they were not pure. Purity meant impunity from death or injury in battle. Therefore, the death of soldiers made sense in the HSM belief system: death was explicable and justifiable; moreover, death was the fault of the sinful soldier, not a failure on the part of the HSM (Behrend, 1999a).

Ultimately, though, Alice's power was dependent on success. Without it, she could not continue to motivate her soldiers to fight if they met with defeat, nor persuade them of the legitimacy of her teachings if they kept dying. The power of the HSM came from its spiritual beliefs, but its success still lay in military might, which it lacked.

After Alice's defeat at Jinja, she fled to Kenya, and her father, Severino Lukoya Kiberu, tried to mount a rebellion under his own Holy Spirit Movement, claiming that he too had spiritual powers. Unlike his daughter, Severino did not attract popular support, and thus resorted to terror tactics and abduction to recruit people to his movement. This earned him the nickname of *otong-tong* which translates as 'one who chops victims to pieces'. Unsurprisingly, his movement died out, due to a lack of organisation or popular support (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999; Lomo and Hovil, 2004). There were two other successor HSM movements: one was a transient effort led by Philip Ojuk, and the other was led by a young man named Joseph Kony.

Little is known about Joseph Kony. Unlike Alice or her father, who encouraged myths to be built up around them, Kony has not, and thus remains an enigma (Behrend, 1999a). Some sources suggest he was a commander in the rebel group the Uganda People's Defence Army prior to starting the LRA (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999; Lomo and Hovil, 2004) but that has never been

confirmed, and others refute the claim (Gersony, 1997). He was born in the village of Odek, to the southeast of Gulu, in 1961, and is reported to have had only a primary school education (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999). Kony claimed to be a spirit medium, and, like Alice, had the spirit of Lakwena speak through him (Behrend, 1999a). He went on to expand his possession repertoire to a host of other spirits, including a Sudanese spirit called Silly Silindi, who was in charge of battlefield strategy, a Chinese spirit called Ing Chu, who turned cars into toys, an American, Major Bianca, who was head of the intelligence service, and Juma Oris, who had been a minister under Idi Amin, and who was still alive and living in southern Sudan (Behrend, 1999a; Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999). Kony claims to have 13 spirits that speak through him, although former commanders say the spirits left Kony in 1999 (Borzello, 2007).

Initially, Kony recruited a number of former UPDA soldiers. Recruitment was voluntary, for the most part, and the target of the LRA was the government. Kony's Holy Spirit Movement changed its name in 1988 to the Lord's Salvation Army, and then became the Uganda People's Democratic Christian Army as it assimilated former UPDA rebels, and in 1993 finally it became the Lord's Resistance Army (Amnesty International, 2007; Behrend, 1999a; Dunn, 2010; Gersony 1997). At its inception, the LRA was just one of several rebel groups active after Museveni took power, although it has been the one that has endured (Cheney, 2005). During the late 1980s, the LRA, too, was just one of many armed groups to brutalise the civilian population of northern Uganda (Dolan, 2005).

In 1991 the World Bank offered the Uganda government funds to rebuild the infrastructure of the north, on the condition of peace and security in the area (Behrend, 1999a). So in April 1991, the government began an anti-insurgent operation, named Operation North, which involved sealing off the districts of Gulu, Kitgum, Lira and Apac, and severely restricted movement to and from these districts and the rest of the country (Dolan, 2005; Human Rights Watch, 1997). Local officials encouraged civilians to attempt to repel LRA attacks themselves, by creating 'bow and arrow' civil defence units, but they received very few guns from the government, who were no doubt wary of arming a civilian militia (Lomo

and Hovil, 2004). These defence units were consequentially limited in their success at resisting rebel attacks.

Operation North failed to eradicate the LRA by its conclusion in 1992, but it did mark a turning point in the LRA's strategy. Initially, the LRA had targeted government troops, but from 1992, they turned their attention to civilians. This change in strategy was in response to the 'bow and arrow' civil defence units, where the civilian, Acholi population had taken up arms against the LRA. Kony felt betrayed by his own people, and by targeting the civilian population, he was seeking revenge on them for siding with the government (Jackson, 2002; Lomo and Hovil, 2004). The LRA began mutilating civilians, cutting the lips and noses of 'informants' and putting padlocks through people's mouths to prevent them reporting the LRA to the authorities (Dolan, 2005; Gersony, 1997). Alice's goal of redeeming the Acholi had been well and truly lost.

In late 1993 to early 1994, the Minister for Pacification of the North, Betty Bigombe, led peace talks between the Ugandan government and the LRA, which appeared promising until Kony demanded a three- to six-month delay in the peace agreement, and Museveni responded by giving the LRA a week to surrender, after which point he reinitiated military operations (Gersony, 1997). Subsequent to the collapse of the peace talks, the Sudanese government began backing the LRA. It is very possible that those negotiations had gone on during the failed peace talks, and Ugandan intelligence was aware of this, which is what pushed Museveni back to a military response (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999).

The Sudanese, for their part, began funding the LRA in order to fight their own rebel group, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), which in turn was being supported by the Uganda government. This resulted in the two rebel groups fighting each other, which amounted to a proxy war between the governments of Uganda and Sudan (Amone-P'Olak, 2007). In 1995, Uganda and Sudan severed diplomatic ties (Jackson, 2002). The SPLA fought the government of Sudan from 1983 until they eventually signed a peace accord in January 2005. The SPLA was led by John Garang – an old friend of Museveni's –

until his death in 2005, and is made up of mostly ethnic Dinka soldiers (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999).

Upon receiving the patronage of Sudan, the LRA moved their base to southern Sudan, although they continued to terrorise northern Uganda, frequently returning across the border. It was in 1994 that the LRA began abducting its recruits on a mass scale. This was a change in tactics resulting from their inability to attract voluntary recruits, given their vicious attacks on their main recruitment pool – the Acholi civilian population. It has also been suggested that this move to enforced recruitment was because they did not want to be infiltrated by spies, while Allen and Schomerus (2006) attribute the change in strategy to the LRA move to southern Sudan, where they were receiving the military supplies they needed from Sudan. Either way, from 1994, the LRA now relied entirely on forced recruitment (Blattman and Annan, 2008; Lomo and Hovil, 2004). Since then, the LRA are estimated to have abducted at least 66,000 people, and abductees constitute 80% of the LRA (Blattman and Annan, 2010a). The LRA has become best known for the abduction of thousands of children, but Dolan (2005) contests that half of abductees are actually adults, and Allen and Schomerus (2006) report that between 1997 and 2001, less than a third of abductees who went through reception centres that are part of the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration process were children.

In 1996, the government began to move the population of the north into 'protected villages', or what have become known as Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps (Morton and Riccio, 2010). The move was designed to keep the civilian populace safe from rebel attacks, by moving them into spaces that were easier for the army to defend and protect, and thus also deprive the LRA of resources that they usually took from civilians, such as food and fighters. By 2005, 1.84 million people were living in 251 camps across northern Uganda (UNHCR, 6th January 2012). More than 90% of the population in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts were displaced to camps (Amone-P'Olak, 2007). Providing for such a vast number of displaced people proved problematic, and the camps were often overcrowded, lacking proper sanitation and food supplies (Lomo, Naggaga and Hovil, 2001). Life in the IDP camps became tense because the victimised



population had to live side by side with former LRA rebels who had returned from the bush (Baines, 2007). By 2007, the year after the LRA left Uganda for good, and the security situation improved, people started to return to what remained of their homes (Bozzoli, Bruck and Muhumiza, 2011). Often, returnees did not even have a home to return to (Annan, Brier and Aryemo, 2009).

On 8th December 1999, the governments of Uganda and Sudan signed a peace accord in Nairobi, the *Nairobi Agreement*, pledging not to support each other's rebels (Dolan, 2005). However, some have argued that it was in fact the USA including the LRA on its list of terrorists in 2001, after the 9/11 attacks, that spurred Sudan to properly end their support for them (African Rights, 16th May 2002; Hovil and Moorehead, 2002).

After lobbying from the Acholi people, the Ugandan government passed the *Amnesty Act* in 1999, and it became law in 2000 (Baines, 2007). The *Amnesty Act* offered a pardon to any rebels who would give up their arms and abandon the rebellion. Those who took up the offer, known as returnees, were given amnesty cards and resettlement packages. Informal Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programs facilitated the process of return and community reconciliation. Disarmament means removing weapons, Demobilisation means taking the rebels out of military service, and Reintegration means assimilating the combatant back into society (Justice and Reconciliation Project, 2008; Veale and Stavrou, 2003). The purpose of the DDR programs is to reduce the risk of returnees rearming, and to ensure that they will be self-sufficient, and not dependent on their communities (Peters, 2007). There is no formal DDR process in Uganda; rather, it is an informal process that started in response to the return of abductees needing services (Borzello, 2007; Chrobok and Akutu, 2008). DDR processes normally take place after a conflict has ended but, in Uganda, the steady stream of rebels who escape or are rescued by the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF)<sup>8</sup>, the national army, has required a DDR

<sup>8</sup> The NRA became the UPDF in 1995 (Branch, 2008)

process while the war is ongoing. In 1994, NGOs became involved in the handling of returnees, with the establishment of US based World Vision and Ugandan Gulu Support the Children Organisation (GUSCO) in Gulu town, although these were mainly geared towards children (Borzello, 2007). The informal DDR process has focused primarily on reintegration, with limited success, rather than disarmament or demobilisation (Blattman and Annan, 2008).

The amnesty has no component of confession as other amnesties, such as the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, have, and instead offers a blanket pardon (Quinn, 2009). Traditional tribal justice also has played a part in reintegrating former LRA members back into their community when they received amnesty (Greenawalt, 2009). The amnesty was granted by the Parliament, but did not guarantee forgiveness from the community – even though it was the Acholi people themselves who had lobbied for the amnesty. Returnees still face stigma and rejection from the communities they had plagued. There is no help for the communities to adjust or learn how to accept these former rebels.

Further, the lack of success of NGO-run reintegration programs in the north is, according to Akello, Ritchers and Reis (2009), attributable to the NGOs treating the former abductees as innocent victims, who have been traumatised by what they have seen, and what they have been forced to do, while their communities do not. This is especially true as there is no accountability mechanism as part of the amnesty – the former abductees do not have to confess to what they did in the bush, or ask for forgiveness (Akello, Ritchers and Reis, 2009). Reintegration is therefore problematic for many former abductees as they face stigmatisation and ostracism in their community for having been a part of LRA (Corbin, 2008). There is a common perception within communities that ‘a child is abducted but a rebel returns’ (Akello, Ritchers and Reis, 2006). For women who have been raped or given birth in captivity, the stigma is far greater (Annan, Brier and Aryemo, 2009; Baines, Harris and McCleery, 2010), as they are seen as ‘wives of rebels’ rather than as victims of rape (Akello, Ritchers and Reis,

2006). Former abductees also struggle to reintegrate because of a lack of education and employment opportunities (Russell and Gozdzia, 2006). Akello, Ritchers and Reis (2006) report that between 2004 and 2005, 300 former abductees who had been rescued were no longer living in their communities three months later, and that more than 70% of juvenile offenders held in the Gulu district juvenile crime unit were former abductees, accused of crime such as rape and assault. Returnees have been absorbed in the UPDF since the beginning of the conflict and, in 2002, the 105th battalion was set up, consisting solely of LRA returnees, although this has now been disbanded (Borzello, 2007). Joining the military is the most economically viable option for young people, and protects them from re-abduction (Annan, Blattman and Horton, 2006).

The *Amnesty Act* can be renewed every six months. The *Act* was renewed for 12 months on 25th May 2012, but part II of the act – the ‘declaration of amnesty’, which grants pardon – was not. The Minister of Internal Affairs, Hilary Onok, chose only to renew the other three parts of the Act, which largely deals with resettlement and reintegration of former rebels (Kersten, 11th July 2012). As of May 2012, 26,288 rebels – from a total of 29 rebel groups – had taken up the amnesty, 12,971 from the LRA (Agger, 2012).

In late 2000, the LRA moved to southern Sudan, because of an Ebola outbreak in Gulu. In 2002, 1,000 LRA soldiers crossed back in to Uganda, and split into five groups. Two groups, under Commander Odiombo, went to Gulu district, and the other three went to Kitgum district (Human Rights Watch, 2003). When the *Amnesty Act* failed to significantly disrupt the LRA, the Ugandan government reverted to military tactics (Veale and Stavrou, 2007). On 5th March 2002, the Sudanese and Uganda governments signed the first protocol that permitted limited Ugandan operations against the LRA in Sudan. So began Operation Iron Fist, but the limited time period that the protocol gave the Ugandan government to act meant that the operation was rushed, and both the Ugandan and Sudanese armies suffered high casualties in separate attacks on 23rd and 24th March 2002 (African Rights, 16th May 2002; Cheney, 2005). According to some reports, the UPDF and the Sudanese army had hoped to rescue a large number of abductees, or aid their escape, at the beginning of Operation Iron Fist,

and had even warned the Amnesty Commission to prepare for a huge influx of returnees. But this was not the case (African Rights, 16th May 2002). The LRA did, however, choose to release 100 abductees in 2002, women and young children, which is the first time this had ever happened (Veale and Stavrou, 2003). The reason for this uncharacteristic move was a practical one: resources were too scarce to feed them (Annan et al., 2008).

Operation Iron Fist caused significant casualties but did succeed in resurrecting LRA's reign of terror in northern Uganda. The presence of the UPDF in Sudan left northern Uganda unprotected, allowing one faction of the LRA still operating there to attack the now vulnerable camps in Gulu (African Rights, 16th May 2002; Cheney, 2005). Now back in Uganda, the LRA did not limit itself to Acholiland. For the 1990s, the war was mostly contained to Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts, but in 2003 it spread, with attacks by the LRA occurring in Lira, Apac, and Katakwi districts, in the Lango and Teso regions. The reason for this spread outside-the Acholi region has been attributed to the fact that the LRA had successfully ravaged the entire Acholi region of anything worth looting or abducting, and therefore had to move to new areas in search of food, weapons and recruits (Lomo and Hovil, 2004). This moved the conflict from being an exclusively Acholi war, as other regions and groups were now also being affected.

Operation Iron Fist in 2002 was swiftly followed by Operation Iron Fist II in 2004. In the same year, President Museveni referred the LRA situation to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague, the Netherlands. Subsequently, the ICC Prosecutor issued five arrest warrants for LRA leader Joseph Kony, and his top commanders, Vincent Otti, Okot Odhiambo, Dominic Ongwen and Raska Lukwiya for multiple counts of crimes against humanity and war crimes (ICC Press Release, 14th October 2005). The arrest warrant against Lukwiya was rescinded after his death was confirmed, and Vincent Otti was reportedly executed on the orders of Kony, although his arrest warrant remains active. Okot Odhiambo – Vincent Otti's successor – allegedly sought to defect from the LRA in early 2009, on the assurance that he would receive amnesty, and not face prosecution in The Hague (IRIN, 30th January 2009). Kony remains at large. And Dominic Ongwen is a former child soldier. He was abducted by the LRA at

the age of ten in 1990, but now faces three charges of crimes against humanity and four charges of war crimes before the ICC (Baines, 2009).

It has been suggested that the referral was designed to encourage other countries where the LRA were based, specifically Sudan, to take action against the LRA (Borzello, 2007). Schabas (2007) argues that it was in fact the ICC that pushed for the referral, because of the benefit in having a state itself refer a case, rather than having to justify picking a particular case over the plethora that had been referred from third parties.

The LRA, meanwhile, left Uganda for good in 2006, and relocated to the war-torn Democratic Republic of Congo (HRW, 9th June 2012). When the ICC referral failed to apprehend Kony and company, peace negotiations resumed, although the ICC indictments against the top five commanders proved to be a major stumbling block. In July 2006, peace talks once again commenced in Juba, South Sudan, and were mediated by the government of Sudan. The talks resulted in the signing of a truce agreement, the *Cessation of Hostilities Agreement*, in August 2006. This truce broke down, and peace talks reopened in 2007 – with the ICC arrest warrants being an issue of great contention. The government and the rebels signed the *Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation* on 29th June 2007, which sought to give Uganda jurisdiction over justice matters relating to the LRA, and also incorporated traditional justice mechanisms. But Kony refused to sign the 2007 *Peace Agreement* because of the ICC arrest warrants (Traylor, 2009; Quinn 2009). The Juba Peace Talks were restarted in February 2008, and the *Annexure Agreement* was added to the *Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation*, which established a special division of the Ugandan High Court to try people accused of ‘serious crimes’ during the conflict (Apuuli, 2008).

But peace efforts were effectively abandoned in late 2008, when, instead of signing the peace agreement, Kony was allegedly ordering the first wave of attacks in the Democratic Republic of Congo that resulted in over 1,033 civilian deaths and the abduction of at least 476 people (Human Rights Watch, 2009). In response, the military campaign was reinstated in November 2008, with the

commencement of Operation Lightning Thunder, and Ugandan troops entering the Congo in December (Human Rights Watch, 2009). Operation Lightning Thunder was launched in conjunction with forces from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan, and with support from the United States (Lubwama, 3rd July 2011). The operation aimed to attack the LRA's north-eastern Congo base, but it failed to destroy it and, in retaliation, the LRA attacked Congolese villages between Christmas 2008 and January 2009, killing more than 865 civilians and abducting hundreds (Human Rights Watch, 2010). It was during this operation that Thomas Kwoyelo was apprehended, and faced the ignominy of being the first person to be tried for war crimes in the newly established International Crimes Division of the High Court in Gulu, northern Uganda. But the trial collapsed after the Constitutional Court held that Kwoyelo was eligible to apply for the amnesty (*Kwoyelo v Uganda*, 2011). Nevertheless, the Director of Public Prosecution has to date refused to grant him amnesty (Drumbl, 2012).

The Ugandan Parliament passed the *International Criminal Court Act* on 9th March 2010, which incorporated international crimes covered by the Rome Statute – genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity – punishable under Ugandan law (Pham and Vinck, 2010), and this appears to be a final move away from the International Criminal Court.

The LRA has not come back into Uganda since 2006, and killings and abductions are now taking place in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo, where thousands have been killed and several hundred abducted (Pham and Vinck, 2010). The LRA originally relocated in the Congo in 2006, but did not begin targeting the Congolese people until September 2008. This, like their decision to target Ugandan civilians fourteen years earlier, was in retaliation for civilians helping LRA defectors. Alternatively, they could have just needed to focus on rebuilding their strength and regrouping, so initially did not attack Congolese civilians (Human Rights Watch, 2009).

It is estimated that, since 2008, at least 2,600 civilians have been killed, and the LRA has abducted a further 4,000 (Human Rights Watch, 9th June 2012). They teach non-Acholi abductees the Acholi language (Human Rights Watch,

20th April 2012). The LRA is now based in the remote border areas of South Sudan, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Human Rights Watch, 2010). Other rebel groups operate in Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and it is not always easy to identify which one is responsible for the various atrocities carried out.

The government military campaigns against the LRA have thus far failed to eradicate them. The problem is that the majority of the LRA fighters are abductees: “It has created a no-win situation for those who are supposed to be fighting a rebel army that is forcibly deploying children in its front-line military operations” (Lomo and Hovil, 2004, p.31). The lack of distinction between a ‘rebel’ and an ‘abductee’ generates confusion, and means that a military operation does not have popular civilian support, as it is the civilian population’s own children who make up the LRA. Parents do not support the government in military campaigns to kill their abducted children. The amnesty is a way to end the war, because it gives rebels a way out without the fear of prosecution, and also provides an incentive to leave. The *Amnesty Act* should have been the biggest threat to the survival of the LRA because abductees now had the option to return home without legal ramifications. But this was not the case (Veale and Stavrou, 2007). In part, this was because of fear about the legitimacy of the *Amnesty Act* (Lomo and Hovil, 2004). The LRA told abductees that the amnesty was false and was a ruse to kill them (Beber and Blattman, 2010). It has also been reported that the LRA instated a policy not to abduct new recruits in Uganda in case they revealed that the amnesty was in fact real, and this would lead to mass escape (Beber and Blattman, 2013). However, the LRA were largely based outside Uganda at this point, making returning home very difficult, even for those who did manage to escape. But nowadays, abductions are occurring outside Uganda, on non-Ugandans, who are not covered by any kind of amnesty. The LRA left Uganda in 2006, so while there is peace in the country, there is no end to the conflict.

## 4.1. Who is the LRA?

The LRA is a relatively small organisation. Vinci (2005) states that the LRA is made up of 1,000 or so committed fighters who are the remnants of the HSM and UPDA, and the abductees who number 3,000 or so. Pham et al. (2007), on the other hand, estimates that the size of the LRA is larger, consisting of between 3,000 and 5,000, but with a core command of only 150-200 soldiers. During the 2006 peace talks in Sudan, the Sudanese government provided food to the rebels in order to discourage looting, much to the consternation of the ICC, who viewed this as supporting ICC inductees (Human Rights Watch, 2009). The LRA requested food for 5,000 fighters, and the group probably has never numbered more than 5,000 (Borzello, 2007). Despite its small size, the LRA succeeds in fending off an army of 40,000-60,000 in Uganda, the SPLA in Sudan, and exerts control over a civilian population of more than a million (Vinci, 2005).

There is in theory a formal military structure, although in practice the LRA “tends to be much more flexible, disorganised and ad hoc” (Vinci, 2005 p.378). The high command is called Control Altar. It is organised into 4 battalions: Sinia, Gilva, Stockrie and Trinkle (Borzello, 2007). The battalions are divided into brigades, led by a brigadier, and these are sub-divided into sub units, which are led by field commanders. When conditions call for it, these sub units divide even further, so that if the LRA are under attack, they can disperse, meaning that an attack on a single unit does minimum damage to the organisation as a whole, and this accounts for their resilience (Vinci, 2005). For example, in response to Operation Iron Fist, the LRA had to change their tactics, and break into smaller fighting units. This allowed them to continue to loot and abduct, but avoid clashes with the UPDF (Bevan, 2007).

There is a core group, and, according to Vinci (2005), the core group voluntarily joined the LRA. Because of the high turnover rate in the LRA, the core group is small (Dolan, 2005). It is within this core that information is centralised, meaning that those in the core are privileged to information, and those of the periphery are not (Justice and Reconciliation Project, 2008). Despite this seeming privilege, those in the inner circle are neither safe nor irreplaceable.



Kony has executed two of his top commanders. Both were second-in-command, and both died in front of a firing squad of the men they had led, on the orders of the man they had followed. Alex Otti-Lagony was put to death in 1999 because of Kony's fear that he was seeking to overthrow him (BBC News, 7th January 2000). Vincent Otti met the same fate in 2007 after the failed Juba Peace Talks. This demonstrates the flexibility and adaptive ability of the LRA: when 'key' members are removed it is able to survive. A long-term rebellion has to be flexible in order to adapt in the face of losses on the battlefield, or a change in tactics by the other side.

In terms of recruitment, the LRA tends to abduct boys between the ages of 12 and 16 years of age. Blattman and Annan (2010a) identify three reasons for this: there is a surplus of boys this age in the region, this age group is more effective at guerrilla warfare than younger children, and they are more effectively indoctrinated than people over the age of 16. This has been a common feature in other rebel groups that abduct (Denov, 2010). When the LRA abducted females, they prefer to abduct pre-adolescent girls, because they are more likely to be virgins and therefore disease free. Girls are not assigned as 'wives' until they reach puberty (Human Rights Watch, 2005; Pham et al., 2005). Pre-pubescent girls, termed *ting ting*, are used for domestic work until they reach puberty and can be taken as wives (Human Rights Watch, 2003). A quarter of abducted females were forced to be 'wives' to LRA commanders (Annan et al., 2008). 'Marriage' within the rebel group means becoming the sexual property of one man (Denov and Gervais, 2007), although commanders can have more than one 'wife'. The number of wives a commander has is determined by his rank, and Carlson and Mazuruana (2008) state that Kony has at least forty 'wives', senior commanders have five, and lower commanders have one or two, while Annan et al. (2008) suggest that half of all LRA commanders have five or more 'wives' and lower level fighters on average have two. The reason for forced 'marriages' with the LRA is that they "served to bolster fighter morale and support the systems which perpetuate cycles of raiding, looting, killing, and abduction" (Carlson and Mazuruana, 2008, p.4). Forced marriage also provides children, and thus a new generation of rebels (Baines, 2014).

The LRA has sought to recreate familiar structures and conventions within the group, such as family and marriage. It has been reported that each abductee is allocated to a family, headed by a commander (Amnesty International, 2007): “It is common for LRA commanders to bring boys and girls too young to fight into their homes, to train them, and to inculcate a sense of loyalty” (Baines, 2009, p.169). This creates strong ties to the group, and gave abductees a sense of belonging (Vermeij, 2009). This is a tactic that has been employed by other rebel groups, including the RUF in Sierra Leone, where abducted children received patronage and protection from the RUF officers who abducted them (Denov, 2010). This most likely has a significant psychological impact on abductees, as it recreates the family dynamic from which they have been forcefully removed. It is difficult to determine what this impact is individually, but these structures no doubt affect the abductees in remaining with the group.

There are strict rules of conduct between abductees in the LRA. These rules regulate sexual behaviour, whereby only the ‘husband’ can rape his ‘wife’, but sex outside ‘marriage’ is forbidden, and the rape of outsiders, such as women in villages they loot, is a warfare tactic, and is not regulated by LRA rules (Amnesty International, 2007; Annan and Brier, 2010). Rules decree that pre-pubescent girls could not be taken as a forced wife (Carlson and Mazurana, 2008). This is a departure from other insurgent groups, such as the RUF in Sierra Leone, or Liberia, where it is not uncommon for female abductees to experience rape within the group, sometimes from multiple perpetrators (McKay, 2004; Utas, 2005). The reason for this difference is because the LRA is also structured around spiritual rules and regulations, dictating personal conduct such as social relations, eating habits and sexual behaviour (Blattman and Annan, 2010a; Justice and Reconciliation Project, 2008). Spirits and spirit mediums are not unusual in Acholi culture, and so the spirits could have helped the LRA – as it had with the HSM before them – to gain legitimacy with the Acholi people (Dolan, 2005; Vinci, 2005). The spiritual dimension serves as a tool of manipulation for Kony (Lomo and Hovil, 2004). The LRA instil a belief that Kony has omnipresent powers and can read minds (Baines, 2009). The abductees appear rarely, if ever, to see Kony, which serves to add to his mystique (Veale and Stavrou, 2003).

Spirits or witchcraft have played role in other African rebellions – Ellis (2006) accredits religious ideology with the victory of Charles Taylor in Liberia after the first Liberian war, and both Renamo and Fremlino in Mozambique utilised spirit mediums (Wilson, 1992).

#### **4.1.1. Tactics**

Initially, Kony espoused the same spiritual rhetoric as Alice, but when the Supreme Commander of the UPDA, Odeng Latek, broke away during the March 1988 peace talks with the NRA and joined Kony's Holy Spirit Movement, he encouraged Kony to switch to guerrilla warfare tactics, and abandon the Holy Spirit Tactics. This, according to Behrend (1999a), reduced the role of the spirits in the movement to insignificance, as they were no longer dictating battle strategy.

The LRA strategy since then can be classified as low intensity warfare, which is characterised by guerrilla tactics rather than head-on battle. The use of guerrilla warfare is common in intra-state conflicts, and is characterised by small, decentralised units that are highly mobile, employing hit-and-run tactics rather than head-on battle, lacking territory of their own and relying on the civilian population for supplies of food or fighters (Weinstein, 2006). The LRA is “adept at waging guerrilla warfare. Many senior LRA have military backgrounds and employ sophisticated military strategies” (Pham et al., 2005, p.15). The LRA clearly have very good military intelligence, and know what is going on in the field, and thus are able to anticipate the movements of the UPDF, which has permitted them some success against the government army (Sturges, 2008). The LRA use two main types of attack: small groups of rebels against civilians for looting purposes, and strategic operations against the UPDF, for arms, ammunition and communication equipment (Agger, 2012). But the LRA has studiously tried to avoid fighting the UPDF head on. Instead, it focuses its attacks on ‘soft’ (civilian) targets.

It has been estimated that 84% of war-related deaths in intrastate conflicts are civilian casualties (Cairns, 1997), although civilian deaths during armed

conflicts are usually considered collateral damage (Valentine, Huth and Balch-Lindsay, 2004). Prior research has proposed several motives for rebels to victimise the civilian population. Weinstein (2006) argues that rebel groups that are active resource rich countries, or groups with external support carry out high levels of indiscriminate violence, because they do not need the support of the civilian population – they can fund themselves through exploiting the resources or from the external backer. On the other hand, with groups active in places where there are not resources to fight over, violence is used selectively. Azam (2004) has also suggested that the reasons to attack the civilian population are resource-based, but that a lack of resources leads to attacks on civilians, because the rebels need to loot from them. He also posits that this serves to incite terror. Likewise, Hoffman (2004) states that violence against civilians is a means to secure resources.

This is a departure from rebel groups who relied on civilian support to maintain their insurgency. Ugandan President, Yoweri Museveni, seized power through his insurgency, and his army, the NRA, had popular support from the civilian population, which no doubt helped to sustain the group: “the National Resistance Army recruited educated university students, many with previous political involvement, through a clandestine urban network; ethnic appeals were among its most crucial tactics” (Weinstein, 2006, p.96). Wood (2010) suggests that weak rebel groups target civilians because they do not have the ability or resources to attract loyalty from them, so instead turn on them. Civilians are seen as a potential power base for one side or the other (Valentine, Huth and Balch-Lindsay, 2004). But both the LRA and the government managed to alienate the local population with their tactics (Bevan, 2007). The civilian population are of the same ethnic group as the LRA, whereas the UPDF largely are not, which breeds distrust, and the LRA, for their part, have waged an incessant campaign of terror on the Acholi civilian population.

One of the defining features of the LRA’s rebellion has been their violence towards the civilian population. The LRA committed massacres of Acholi civilians, usually killing with clubs or machetes: Atiak in 1995, where 200 civilians were killed, Karuma and Acholi camps in 1996, with death tolls of 50 and 100

respectively, and Lokung-Palabek in 1997, which left over 400 civilians dead (Jackson, 2002; Vinci, 2005). Since the LRA left Uganda in 2006, they have carried out similar massacres on non-Acholi civilians. In December 2009, 321 people were tied up and killed with machetes, axes and clubs in the Haut Uele district of north-eastern Congo (Human Rights Watch, 2010). Numerous similar atrocities have been perpetrated in Congo and the Central African Republic (Human Rights Watch, 9th June 2012, 29th April 2012).

Mutilation of the victims has become a hallmark of many African insurgencies. Mutilation, such as severing the lips, ears, nose, fingers or hands, is a visible display of violence, not just for the victim, but for others to see. It is an overt display of the rebels' dominance. Renamo forces in Mozambique had virtually no popular support among the civilian population, nor any real ideology, and they were very violent towards the civilian population, and were known for cutting off lips, ears and noses (Edmondson, 2005; Kalyvas, 2001). Likewise, the RUF brutalised the civilian population of Sierra Leone: "those in Sierra Leone hacked, raped, and pillaged their way through the countryside in a war that cost more than 10,000 lives" (Weinstein 2006, p.5). The RUF were known for amputations: their abducted boy soldiers would carry out amputations on civilians, cutting their arms at the wrist or elbow, attacks that were crudely termed long or short sleeves. Boys reported feelings of power and superiority doing this (Maclure and Denov, 2006). RUF amputations were symbolic: they were designed to deter civilians from voting in 1996 elections, which was an attempt to transition to an elected government (Park, 2006), but perhaps also served to give the perpetrators, the abducted soldiers, a feeling of allegiance to the group. But forced recruits do not always relish participating in violence. Eriksson Baaz and Stern (2008) interviewed members of the Integrated Armed Forces (FARDC) in the Democratic Republic of Congo, who claimed that they became soldiers through force or necessity, not because they had a desire to be violent. The participants also stated that poverty, suffering and frustration led them to engage in violence, and the lack of accountability in the virtually lawless Congo made it easier to perpetrate atrocities, but they do not report enjoying the violence.

The civilians being targeted by the LRA are their own people, the Acholi, and Gersony (1997) credits the LRA's demand for obedience, and 'punishment' for lack of obedience from the civilian population, as the reason behind their violence. For example, the LRA cut the legs off cyclists, because bicycles are an important mode of transport, and thus provided a means of spreading information (Vinci, 2005). The LRA also cut off the hand, mouth or eyes of civilians they deemed to be government informers because in Chapter 5 of St Matthew's Gospel in the New Testament of the Bible<sup>9</sup>, Jesus is reported as saying that it is better to cut off the part of the body that is at fault; therefore if a person reports on the LRA, they have their lips cut off, if they raise arms to the LRA, they have their hand cut off (Borzello, 2007).

The violence is very strategic, designed to instil fear and insecurity into the civilian population. As Hovil and Moorehead point out, the LRA has systematically used terror as a tactic: "the impact that rebels have had is not so much a reflection of their military might, but on their ability to instil and exploit fear within the populations" (2002, p.4). Tools of fear and intimidation in guerrilla warfare are essential – targeting civilians instils fear in the population, and also sends the message that the government is unable to protect them (Hoffman, 2004). Pham et al. (2005) suggest that the nature of the LRA attacks, consisting of massacres interspersed with low levels of activity, serves to induce a climate of fear. Given that the LRA has neither the numbers nor the strength to take on the far better equipped Ugandan army, they must instead rely on terror tactics and the use of fear is to compensate for lack of strength and fighting force of rebel groups, compared to those of the state they are rebelling against (Laqueur, 1997; Vinci, 2005). Its viciousness towards abductees and civilian alike has created a climate of fear around the LRA (Vinci, 2005). Abducting youth and children has also been a means of instilling fear into the minds of civilians (Berber and

<sup>9</sup> "5:29 And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

5:30 And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell." (Gospel According to St. Matthew, Chapter 5, New Testament)

Blattman, 2010). The LRA also uses the element of surprise to compensate for its lack of manpower. The unpredictability of attacks, especially with the LRA's small flexible units, means that the civilian and military population do not know when or where an attack or ambush will occur, creating insecurity.

#### **4.1.2. Goals**

The LRA has not publicly stated what it is the group is aiming to achieve, and thus has not committed to a desired outcome of its rebellion. This has led to some contention over whether the LRA has any goals, leading to the assumption that it engages in violence for violence's sake alone (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999; Vermeli, 2009). It is not clear what the LRA is hoping to achieve with the continued rebellion. It lacks goals or lacks the communication of those goals. Its agenda seems to be nothing more than its mere survival. Certainly, it has never posed any real threat to Museveni's government in Kampala, especially given the conflict's confinement to the north of the country. The LRA does not advertise its goals in the manner of other rebel groups; for example, the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone published a manifesto entitled 'Footpath to Democracy' outlining their aims (Weinstein, 2006). Perhaps it is because of Kony's lack of education that he is unable to formulate or articulate any clear agenda, rather than because the LRA does not necessarily have them. Nevertheless, a clear reason for engaging in rebellion is necessary to gain support from the local populace (Twesigye, 2010).

Jackson (2002) found the greed/grievance approach is too limited to explain the conflict in northern Uganda. While there are certainly grievances for the Acholi, a shared grievance or discrimination should act to unite those facing adversity and create a sense of identification (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Alice Lakwena's original goal was to purify the Acholi people, but Kony has alienated the Acholi, and in turn, he saw the Acholi as betraying him when they sided with the government to repel his attacks (Lomo and Hovil, 2004).

As for greed, Acholiland does not have key resources or wealth (Van Acker, 2004). The looting has never been vastly profitable. But the LRA do not

engage in looting for short-term personal gain activities – looting has a purpose beyond personal gratification, to meet basic needs of survival (Bevan, 2007). It has been suggested that the civilian population are social capital to the LRA (Azam and Hoeffler, 2002), and Bevan (2007) tries to make an argument that they are the ‘resources’ the LRA exploit, but they do that out of need, not as a motive to start a rebellion.

Borsello (2007) speculates that the ideological goals are to cleanse the Acholi of their sins, much like the HSM before them, and create a new generation of Acholi, who live according to the Ten Commandments. Cheney, meanwhile argues that the LRA is trying to attain its “concept of ideal citizenship: Acholi purification through violence” (2005, p.33), perhaps a corruption of what Alice Lakwena was seeking to achieve. It would appear that Kony seeks to purify or redeem the Acholi through slaughtering them, then creating his own Acholi tribe by forced procreation between his commanders and the women they abduct and rape.

It is hard to envision that the LRA is seeking to do anything more than destroy the Acholi people. The structure of the Acholi society as a whole has broken down because of the war, and the resultant poverty and displacement (Cheney, 2005). The conflict has served to ruin the region’s economy, agriculture and health care system (Ehrenreich, 1998). What is more, “the impoverishment of displaced persons, among other factors, has caused a breakdown in social values” (Human Rights Watch, 2005, p.34).

If there are political goals, they appear to be rooted in the marginalisation of the Acholi people: “it is clear that the rebels exist because of political grievances in northern Uganda, even if the LRA forces on the ground have historically lacked the ability to articulate them” (Borzello, 2007, p.395). The Justice and Reconciliation Project (2008) identify the political ideology as grievances against the government, the belief that the government are attempting to exterminate the Acholi people, and finally the overthrow of the government. New recruits are promised a role in the new government when the LRA overthrow



Museveni, and as most come from poor backgrounds with very limited opportunities, this is an incentive (Vermeij, 2011).

Vinci (2007) suggests that initially the LRA fought for political goals, but now its motivation to fight is existential, to provide security and a vocation for its fighters. He argues that the LRA has become a way of life, with commanders having a job, wielding power, and having a family in the bush, none of which would be available in civilian life. Having begun the rebellion, they have no option but to continue it, but this is failing to take into account the *Amnesty Act*, which means that all but the five ICC indicted leaders are able to return to civilian life, without legal ramifications. Furthermore, the DDR process means that former rebels are able to access education, and receive assistance in getting a job, and having somewhere to live.

## **5. Cults and Charisma**

The spiritual and religious features of the LRA, within the context of cults and other African theo-centric movements provide a framework by which to understand why forced recruits stay and advance within the LRA. Previous research has focused on the LRA as a rebel group, treating it in terms of a military organisation, but this overlooks the importance of the spirits to the internal structure of the group. The LRA is led, after all, not by a military man, but by a spirit medium. Thus, the LRA can be understood in the context of other religious movements, which often rely on the spiritual dimensions that seem so central to the LRA's apparent ideology, and the leaders that inspire loyalty through their perceived charisma. This chapter will address the points of convergence and divergence between the LRA and other African religious movements, both pacifist and rebellious, and examine the phenomenon of charismatic authority, and how it can apply to the LRA leader to explain the loyalty of abductees and the endurance of the group.

### **5.1. African Religious Movements**

There is a tradition in Uganda of religious cults, and in Sub Saharan Africa as a whole for spiritually driven civil war. There are several armed groups in the region that have had both spiritual and political goals, such as the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya, the Maji Maji Movement in former German East Africa (modern day Tanzania), and both Renamo and Fremlino in Mozambique. Specific to Uganda, there is a clear precedent of religious movements, such as the Nyabingi Liberation Movement, the East Africa Revival Movement (known as the Balokole Movement) and Movement for the Restoration on the Ten Commandments of God (MRTCg), demonstrating that the LRA is far from unique as a spiritual and bellicose group (Twesigye, 2010). The LRA itself was initially a

successor movement to the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM), which relied almost entirely on spiritual resources to fight a conventional war, and failed as a result. Twesigye describes the LRA and HSM as “theocratic religio-political movements, which are rooted with this African culture, traditional religion, and politics... (they) are valid African religio-liberation movements, and not evil ‘cults” (2010, p.85).

Christianity in particular has been an important and inflammatory issue within Uganda, having been introduced in pre-colonial times and, in Buganda, certainly, it facilitated the process of British rule, after the Kabaka (King) had been forced to turn to the British to help to deal with the conflict between Anglicans and Catholics in his kingdom. Christianity had been brought in to Uganda as a divided religion with Catholic and Anglican missionaries warring for converts, and the British favour to the Anglican minority stratified the divide, marginalising the Catholics. The religious segregations within Uganda are important to the rise of these religious movements, the majority of which have been Catholic, given that they tended to be unequally treated and therefore were ideal candidates for recruitment (Mutibwa, 1992, Twesigye, 2010).

The East Africa Revival Movement is an exception, as it was an Anglican movement that arose within colonial Uganda, Ruanda (modern day Rwanda) and Urundi (Burundi) in the 1930s. It was known as the Balokole movement, which means ‘The Saved People’ in Luganda, the language of the Buganda kingdom, where the movement originated. The goal of the movement was to seek salvation, and spiritual renewal from what they viewed as a morally corrupt Anglican Church (Ward, 2012, 1989). The Revival spread within Uganda from Buganda to western Uganda, specifically the Kigezi district of south-western Uganda, which borders Rwanda. The Kigezi district is now four districts: Kabale, Kanungu, Kisoro and Rukungiri (Ward, 2012). However, the Revival did not have much of an impact in the north of the country. The Balokole was an apocalyptic group, teaching its many followers that the end of the world was imminent, although the doomsday they predicted failed to materialise (Twesigye, 2010).

In the same region in south-western Uganda, in Kanungu district, another doomsday cult, this time Catholic, emerged in 1989, called the Movement for the

Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God (MRTCG), led by Father Dominic Kataribabo, Ceredonia (Keledonia) Mwerinde and her father, John Kibwetere. They, like the Balokole, preached about divine judgement for sinners, and salvation for those who repented and, like the Balokole they prophesied the end of the world. Unlike the Balokole, though, when they failed correctly to predict the end of the world, the leaders massacred thousands of their members, in what is the highest death toll for an apocalyptic religious movement not engaged in war. In March 2000, the leaders burned their followers to death in a church in Kanungu, nailing the doors and windows shut, so no one could escape, and igniting vats of petrol and sulphuric acid placed around the church. There are 534 people who are officially known to have died. In the days following the fire, the bodies of hundreds of other followers, who had been strangled or stabbed to death, were found in pit latrines in properties belonging to the cult. It is estimated that between 2,500 and 3,500 people were killed in total. The massacres occurred after leaders claimed that doomsday would come at the close of 31st December 1999. When 1st January 2000 dawned without incident, they quickly re-estimated the end of the world for 18th March that year, then proceeded to kill off any of their followers who did not believe them, and buried them in the mass graves that were to come to light after they had incinerated the rest of their followers at Kanungu the day before the doomsday they had once again wrongly predicted (Twesigye, 2010).

The use of fire to 'martyr' the MRTCG members is significant within Uganda's religious history, because it was the method of execution for the Christian Martyrs. Among the Christian Martyrs are 22 Catholic converts who were burnt to death at Namugongo on 3rd June 1886 on the orders of the Kabaka (King) of Buganda, Mwanga II. These martyrs have been canonised, and the anniversary of their deaths are celebrated as a national holiday in Uganda. By using fire to kill their followers, the leaders of the MRTCG were attempting to align their movement to the Catholic martyrs who died for their faith (Twesigye, 2010).

Apocalyptic movements, like the Balokole and the MRTCG, attracted support and recruits from amongst the civilian population because they played on people's fears and anxieties, and offered them a way out. The rise of these

groups can be attributed to the social conditions affecting the civilian population at this time, including disease, instability, poverty and war. Often, these afflictions were interpreted as being God's punishment for the sins of corruption, homosexuality, promiscuity, theft and prostitution (Twesigye, 2010). The doomsday prophecies seemed meaningful when faced with the realities of war and HIV/AIDS, especially when coupled with the promise of redemption and a better after-life. Doomsday predictions also garnered legitimacy from within Christian literature, as apocalyptic revelations appear in several Biblical books, including Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah and the Book of Revelation. Redemptive religions specifically appeal to those facing adversity because they offer comfort in life, and the promise of salvation in the next life. "Religious people expect God to save them from their state of oppression, poverty, discrimination, disenfranchisement and despair" (Twesigye, 2010, p.116). Therefore there will always be people who will respond to 'messiahs' who promise to do just that for them, whereas people who are not faced with these adverse, oppressive conditions do not need to follow false prophets. But apocalyptic religious groups, such as the Balokole and MRTCG were not trying to help people deal with the issues and problems that confronted them; rather, they were exploiting people suffering these hardships.

Clearly, there was a precedent for religious movements within the south of Uganda, but, unlike their northern counterparts, the southern movements were peaceful<sup>10</sup>. In the north, where the population was poorer, less educated and more vulnerable than their southern brethren, the religious movements were amalgamated with traditional means for overthrowing the perceived cause of their grievances. Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) was a Catholic movement in northern Uganda, addressing the spiritual pollution amongst her own people, the Acholi. The HSM, along with the Church, sought to cleanse the Acholi after their defeat in Luwero: Alice "offered a way of redemption, which could be interpreted in Christian terms" (Ward, 2001, p.199).

<sup>10</sup> With the exception of the MRTCG mass murder

The HSM shared many similarities with the MRTCG. For example, like the HSM, the MRTCG engaged in rituals, including an anointment with 'holy water' made from burnt fingernails and body hair, mixed with water. Alice in particular had much in common with the founder of the MRTCG, Ceredonia (Keledonia) Mwerinde, who was a Primary School Four<sup>11</sup> drop out and prostitute, and was the medium through which God conveyed the message to the MRTCG (Deusdedit and Nkuruziza, 2000). Alice herself is alleged to have been a prostitute, and like Ceredonia, was barely educated. Both sought to reform the corruption that they saw in society. Both women became the mediums through which the spiritual messages of the groups were conveyed. For Alice, it was the Holy Spirit that was guiding the group, and for Ceredonia, it was the Virgin Mary. Nevertheless, the movements had very different understandings as to why spirits had been sent to lead them: the MRTCG believed that Uganda is God's chosen holy nation, because of the Christian Martyrs, whereas the HSM believed that God had sent the spirits to the Acholi on account of how sinful they were (Behrend, 1999a; Twesigye, 2010). The MRTCG members also removed themselves from the society that they viewed as corrupt, whereas the HSM attacked it head on, trying to affect change. Ultimately, though, the leaders of the MRTCG – who are alleged to have died in the fire along with their followers, although the bodies of those in the Church were too badly burnt to be identified – found, as Alice had found before them, that it is not possible to sustain a theology in the face of failure. The MRTCG failed to predict doomsday – twice – and Alice failed to defeat the NRA, and as a result, both movements themselves failed, with substantial loss of life.

The HSM engaged in what has been termed spiritual warfare (Ward, 2001), whereby they were relying on spiritual means to achieve military goals. This proved fatal to Alice's movement. The HSMF engaged in head on warfare with the NRA, which resulted in the bloody end of the group. Alice had promised her followers that God would intervene on their behalf in battle, but this proved not to be an infallible tactic. Unfortunately it was their only tactic, and as they lacked

<sup>11</sup> Primary Four (P4) is the fourth year of primary education

the weaponry or military ability to take on the government army in conventional battle, they were massacred (Behrend, 1999a). Likewise, the Maji Maji movement in German East Africa (modern day Tanzania) in 1905 relied on spirits and spirit mediums to overthrow their colonial masters. A prophet called Kinjikitile Ngwale, much like Alice, raised people in rebellion by promising that his *maji* war medicine (water mixed with millet and castor oil) would protect them from German bullets. It did not, nor did it prevent the Germans from hanging Ngwale (Giblin and Monson, 2010). The Maji Maji uprising, like the HSM, failed because of their over-reliance on religion and misplaced faith in the ability of water to protect them from bullets. Moral crusades fail without military might.

Alice abandoned the HSM after their defeat signalled the end of the group, despite attempts of other men to take over as leader. Kony built upon the legacy of Alice, creating legitimacy for his own movement by borrowing aspects of Alice's movement that had made it so appealing, such as the shea butter oil rituals and the spirit Lakwena, and therefore initially gained support from amongst her followers. But he did not rely on the spirits as Alice had. Indirect guerrilla tactics have served the LRA far better, and the LRA has become a rebel group that utilises spirits, rather than a spiritual group engaged in warfare.

Spirit mediums have played important roles in other Sub-Saharan civil wars, although, unlike the HSM and Maji Maji, they have not been the leaders of the counter insurgency movements. In Zimbabwe, spirit mediums served to gain the support of the local populace during their war of independence. When the Rhodesians were training Renamo, in Mozambique, they encouraged Renamo to adopt the practice of using spirit mediums to secure legitimacy and authority amongst the Mozambican people. In response, a spirit healer, by the name of Manual Antonio, built up a group called Naprama to support Fremlino against Renamo, turning the Mozambique war in independence into a 'war of the spirits' (Wilson, 1992).

Behrend (1999b) related that it was common for spirit mediums to be consulted prior to combat in pre-colonial times. For the Acholi, priests traditionally acted as spirit mediums for the *jogi* (singular: *jok*) spirits, which were forces that

could take possession of people or animals, and could be used for a variety of purposes, such as healing, protection, or killing. When Christianity was introduced to Acholiland, *jogi* came to take on some Christian elements, and the previous ambivalent spirits adopted qualities of good and evil, as demonstrated by an all-good Christian God known as *Jok Rubanga*, and evil, Satan-like spirits became *jogi setani* (Behrend, 1999b; P'Bitek, 1980). When Idi Amin came to power, and many Christians fled the Muslim leader, Behrend (1999b) relates that many good *jogi*, such as the Virgin Mary and Jesus, suddenly began to appear within the Acholi repertoire, and this again demonstrates the importance of belief in a supernatural power during periods of struggle. People seek solace, and religion offers them comfort.

Despite a clear tradition of spirit mediums in Acholi culture, and religious movements in Uganda, it is hard to convince people of the religious or spiritual validity of Kony's movement when they are engaging in gross human rights abuses. The LRA has violated every one of the Ten Commandments they allegedly seek to impose on Uganda, and it is not clear how a religious goal for the movement could co-exist with the brutality they practise. Unlike Alice, Kony's cleansing is ethnic cleansing - more a war crime than a religious ritual. While it is clear to see the tradition from which the LRA has grown, the way the LRA has evolved in its own right is at odds with the way they operate. But the MRTCG massacred their followers, thus displaying the same kind of brutality as the LRA.

Both the Balokole and MRTCG have been described as religious cults, because of their closed nature, rather than because of their adherence to religious maxims. Lalich defines as a cult as follows:

A cult can be either a sharply bounded social group or a diffusely bounded social movement held together through shared commitment to a charismatic leader. It upholds a transcendent ideology (often but not always religious in nature) and requires a high level of personal commitment from its members in words and deeds. (2001, p.124)

The important characteristics that she identifies in a cult is a group that is bound by their commitment to a charismatic authority, a group that shares an



ideology, and a group where each member is invested heavily in the group. The LRA shares many of the characteristics of cults in that its actions are shrouded in secrecy, it operates in isolation, cut off both physically and socially from society, and it engages in rituals (Bromley, 2004; Twesigye, 2010). Its perpetration of violence, however, does not fit. Religious movements are more likely to be the victims of violence than they are to be perpetrators of violent acts, and when they do perpetrate violence against their own members, it tends to be in the form of mass murder or suicide (Bromley, 2004), as was the case with the People's Temple at Jonestown, and the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God at Kanungu.

Lalich (2004) contends that believers undergo a conversion when they adopt the beliefs of the cult. There is a process of transformation: "reorganisation of the person's inner identity" (p.16). Cult members are socialised to comply, which is what Vermeij (2011) is what happens with forced recruits within the LRA. She argues that the indoctrination process, in which violence played a central role, causes abductees to adopt new values and even identities so that they become tied to the LRA. The fundamental difference, however, is that cult members choose to join, whereas abductees, by nature, did not. There is an incongruity between belief and coercion; whereby with a voluntary recruit, there is a belief in the validity and the legitimacy of the cult, but when a person is coerced to join they have no commitment or investment to the beliefs of the group.

Cult members do not always act out of free will, as Lalich (2004) points out. She gives the example of the People's Temple in Jonestown, Guyana, whose members were forced, at gunpoint to drink a mixture of cyanide and fruit juice. They did not willingly commit mass suicide, but rather were forced to do so. This, however, is a result of the "self-sealing nature of the cult" (Lalich, 2004, p.18), which makes it hard to leave once a person chooses to stay. However, choice is key, and the cult members make the initial decision to join, whereupon their choices become more bounded and actions more coerced. The devotion to a charismatic leader is often what binds a follower to a cult, and explains the slow depletion of his or her own free will.

## 5.2. Charismatic Authority

Charisma is a “compulsive, inexplicable emotional tie linking a group of followers together in adulation of their leader” (Lindholm, 1990, p.6). Followers have a motivation and commitment to the group that the leader enhances. Charisma is the basis for the leader’s authority when people willingly participate out of loyalty (Weber, 1947). Charisma is a special or extraordinary quality that may be “actual, alleged or presumed” (Weber, 1946, p.295), meaning that it is something that is perceived by the followers. It is not necessarily an attribute that the leader possesses, it is simply what he or she is seen to have (Lindholm, 1990; Weber, 1946). Charisma is not, Ellis (1991) contends, a quality at all, if it depends on the recognition of it by others; charisma is in fact a relation between the leader and followers, not a characteristic of the leader.

Thus, a charismatic leader is one who inspires loyalty because of characteristics he or she is perceived to possess, unrelated to status. Charismatic authority can be identified as the emotional bond between a leader and his or her subordinates that gives legitimacy to the leader, and justifies the subordinates in following him (Lalich, 2004). Authority differs from power in that power is merely the ability to impose one’s will, whereas the authority of the leader must be recognised by those over whom the individual seeks to have authority, they grant it to the leader (Weber, 1947). Submission is voluntary, and the followers willingly obey (Scott, 1978).

Does Kony have authority, or just power? He clearly has power, in that he has the ability to impose his own will over his band of abductees. How legitimate do they perceive that power to be? Legitimacy is based on the ‘subordinates’ perception. According to Weber (1947), there are three bases for legitimacy: rational grounds, traditional grounds, and charismatic grounds – usually existing in combination. Rational authority has a legal basis, and resides in the office of the holder, such as that of a Prime Minister; traditional authority is based upon the historical sanctity of the role, like the Monarchy, and is based upon succession, while Weber defines charismatic authority as “resting on devotion to the specific and exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person,

and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him” Weber, 1947, p.328) – allegiance is based upon his personal characteristics, and that is what people become loyal to. It is based on an emotional appeal (Conger, 1993). Willner and Willner (1965) suggest that charismatic leaders emerge particularly in former colonial states, where colonialism had undermined traditional authority, and nationalism undermined legal authority. This vacuum provides an ideal situation in which charismatic leaders can establish themselves.

If charisma is dependent on the perception of the followers, this calls into question Kony’s charisma, because the vast majority of his followers are not part of the LRA through choice: they have been abducted. Authority cannot be imposed, it must be given by those over whom the leader seeks to have power (Scott, 1978). Leadership based on coercion is not charismatic authority – if a follower or subordinate complies because the leader employs coercion, has material rewards, or has legitimate authority in their role, it is not charisma, because compliance is based upon something other than the subordinates’ belief in the leader (Ellis, 1991). Jackson (2009) suggests that fear has been a great motivator for the LRA insurgency, meaning that people obey Kony out of fear, not out of loyalty.

Further, charisma “involves not a suspension of values and beliefs nor mere behavioural change but a transformation of followers’ values and beliefs” (Ellis, 1991, p.308), which means that the followers experience a change in their attitude or belief when they come under the influence of a charismatic. But Kony is manipulating normative beliefs in spirits and spirit mediums. After all, the Acholi language has a word for mediums and prophets, but, until recently, did not have a word for rape (Behrend, 1999a; Porter, 2013). This demonstrates how normal spirits and prophets are within the culture, so prophetic abilities are not extraordinary to the Acholi. On the other hand, Willner and Willner (1965) argue that perceived charisma is in fact often the result of successful manipulation of cultural myths or values, so in that sense, Kony is a charismatic. Alice, too, relied on these culturally conceived notions of prophetic abilities, and she successfully gained legitimacy as a leader.

Ellis (1991) points out that if charisma is not a trait possessed by the leader, it is something that emerges from structural conditions within the organisation. He posits that hierarchal organisations are most conducive to the emergence of a charismatic authority, because of the asymmetry of authority. While the LRA is supposedly structured like a conventional military hierarchy (Blattman and Annan, 2010a), the nature of guerrilla warfare, and the conditions of secrecy in which it must operate to avoid attacks from the Ugandan army, suggests that it operates more like a decentralised network than a highly organised army. The HSM, in contrast, was centralised and had a hierarchal structure. They did not use guerrilla tactics, instead facing the NRA in head on battle, much to their detriment (Behrend, 1999a).

Alice Auma was a charismatic: she succeeded in convincing the civilian population of her prophetic ability, rallying recruits who came of their own accord, and who were willing to go into battle completely unprotected, simply because she had told them that shea butter oil made them immune to bullets. While this frequently proved not to be the case, she still succeeded in mobilising willing soldiers. It was only when she fled that the group fell apart. It was reliant on her, as its leader, to survive. Kony differs from Alice because he failed to attract voluntary recruits: people were not prepared to join him. Vinci (2007) claims that initially Kony did succeed in attracting voluntary recruits, and this is proof of his charisma, although Hofmann and Deawson (2014) point out that this is a tautology, as Vinci is stating that Kony is a charismatic leader and this is how he attracts voluntary recruits, but then uses the presence of voluntary recruits within the LRA as proof that Kony is charismatic. But Kony did succeed where Alice's father and Philip Ojuk failed in enticing Alice's followers to his movement, and in maintaining his movement, which suggests that he did have some quality as a leader that the other two lacked.

Kony has succeeded in enduring, as a leader, for decades. He does succeed in getting forced recruits to at the least comply and submit to his power. As a leader, has he successfully inspired devotion or simply undermined resistance? Biderman (1957) and Lewis Herman (2010) both suggest that the fear of violence is instrumental in achieving compliance, as can the demonstration

of omnipotence, which creates the impression that it is futile to resist, whereas submission, according to Wilson and Kwileck (2003) comes when a person recognises the extraordinary powers of the leader.

A charismatic leader will have an inner circle who reinforce his role as a charismatic – it is to their advantage, after all, to maintain the power of the leader as it is what gives them their relative power within the group – while the rest of the group will not be exposed to the leader, as overexposure erodes the mystery, and hence perceived charisma, of a leader (Bromley, 2004; Hofmann and Dawson, 2014). New members are initiated into the ‘cult of personality’ by being regaled with stories of the leader’s abilities, but they nonetheless will be kept at a distance from the leader. This certainly appears to hold true within the LRA, where Kony has a core group of commanders, but to the rest of the group, he appears to be an enigma. Prior research, too, has related that new members are told myths about Kony, such as that he can read people’s minds (Baines, 2009).

Charismatic authority is often linked to religion because of the emphasis of the moral order that the leader is seen to represent, such as Alice purifying the Acholi (Parsons, 1968). Charisma, according to Weber, tends to be perceived as divinely given or inspired, but this requires the leader to live up to expectation. A charismatic can only live up to their claims, so a prophet must be able to foresee the future correctly, a spirit medium must have the right spirits speak through them, a leader must succeed. If they fail, God is perceived as abandoning them (Hofmann and Dawson, 2014). Charismatic authority is dependent on success.

Charisma is necessary for compliance when a group is “unable to compel obedience or contributions, and they must rely on persuasion to achieve group aims” (Ellis, 1991, p.314). The violent nature of the LRA’s rebellion calls into question the utility or even need for charisma, as the group is intent upon obedience through coercion. The brutal and warlike nature of the LRA also calls into question whether religious movements and rebellions are ever compatible. Islamic terrorist groups, such as ISIS or Al Shabaab are an example of movements that profess to follow a religious ideology, but their actions appear to contradict the tenets of the religion they claim to follow. Lindholm (1990) points

out that groups bound to a charismatic leader tend to be nonviolent, although Lalich (2004) states that cults will engage in acts of violence when it is consistent with their belief system or ideology. Bromley (2004), too, argues that there is a link between charismatic leaders and the use of violence, because authority of that nature tends to be unstable.

## **6. Recruitment in Rebellions**

The LRA rebellion shares several of the traits that have come to characterise rebel conflicts in Africa over the past decades, including the use of forced recruitment, teenage soldiers, violence against civilians and ambiguous motivations for fighting. But the LRA is unique in that it has endured far longer than other rebel groups in the region, despite being almost entirely made up of abductees, the implementation of a blanket amnesty in the midst of the conflict, which has failed to effectively disrupt the group, and the fact it has no resources or outside funding to maintain a rebellion, other than a few years of support from Sudan. A successful rebel group must be able to sustain itself, both in terms of recruiting, retaining and motivating members to fight, and finding funding for food and arms. These prerequisites are exacerbated when a group is made up of people who have been forcibly recruited and therefore should have no reason to be loyal to the group, or participate in its conflict.

This research seeks to understand why people who were recruited by force by the LRA remain with the group, and rise through the ranks to command positions, when they should be expected to have no allegiance to the group, and to desert at the first possible opportunity. This is important because uncovering the mechanisms by which the LRA manages to retain forced recruits explains how this rebel group has succeeded in surviving for the best part of three decades. This chapter provides an overview and evaluation of the scholarly research that has addressed the recruitment, retention and desertion of recruits, both forced and voluntary, in the LRA and other comparable rebel groups, and identifies the gaps in the literature.

## 6.1. Forced Recruitment

Recruitment is challenging for rebel groups. Rebellions are risky, so, when attracting potential recruits, it is difficult to present the benefits of participating as outweighing the dangers. Even then, rebels cannot afford to be indiscriminate about who they recruit, because the quality of the recruits matters, as low quality recruits will compromise the effectiveness of the group (Hegghammer, 2013). New recruits must help the group to move closer to its goals.

Prior research has found that recruitment means being able to mobilise people who are willing to fight for the rebel group. The resources available to the group shape recruitment, because resources offer an incentive to join. However, those who are motivated to join by material and pecuniary incentives tend not be valuable to the group (Grossman, 1999, Hegghammer 2013; Weinstein, 2005, 2006). Studies of recruitment in rebel groups emphasize the importance of picking high quality recruits. Not all potential recruits are of the same value to the group. Weinstein (2005, 2006) points out that high commitment recruits are invested in the organization and its goal, whereas low commitment recruits are consumers, only interested in their own, short term gains that their participation can provide, which will compromise the group.

The problem of attracting 'good' recruits is illustrated by Sierra Leone's RUF, who found that the people who would join them voluntarily tended to be unemployed and undereducated youth, as these were the people who were or disillusioned by the lack of employment opportunities, and therefore were willing to rise up in arms. However, it became clear that unemployed and undereducated young people were not an ideal recruitment pool, as the RUF needed recruits who could read and write, as most of their orders being conveyed through written messages. These willing but illiterate recruits therefore were of no real value to the RUF, and the group turned to abduction to forcibly recruit the literate (Peters and Richards, 1998; Weinstein, 2005).



Other rebel groups in the region have turned to abduction when voluntary recruitment failed. Renamo, when it was first founded in 1975, recruited from all discontented Mozambique ethnic groups. Renamo was initially being supported and financed by the Rhodesians, and having an outsider backer also meant that the risk to participants was lower (Weinstein, 2005). But after Rhodesia became independent and stopped supporting the group, Renamo had no choice but to turn to coercive recruitment because they had no money to pay salaries. They also turned to looting and the trade in ivory to fund their activities (Boothby et al., 2006; Weinstein, 2005).

It has been reported that the LRA was originally made up of voluntary recruits – not everyone who spent time with the LRA did so by force – but the policy of forced recruitment took off in 1994 (Lomo and Hovil, 2004). The LRA forcibly recruited people by abducting them. As the LRA has been responsible for the slaughter of their own people, they were therefore unable to motivate people to join voluntarily. Losing the support of the Acholi meant the LRA could not recruit volunteers (Jackson, 2002).

This raises the question of the utility of using forced recruits. Research has outlined the problems with voluntary recruitment, in terms of finding committed and relatively skilled people willing to engage in rebellion. When recruitment is not voluntary, and people have been forced to join a group against their will, they should, according to the logic of previous work, such as Weinstein (2005), not make for good recruits. They have no long- or short-term commitment to the group. Nevertheless, Kony – and other rebel leaders in the region – has succeeded in creating and sustaining a rebel group using forced recruits. The reasons they are able to do this warrants investigation.

## **6.2. Child Soldiers**

Research has found that where abduction is used as a means of recruitment, often it is people under the age of eighteen who are forcibly recruited: “all groups that forcibly recruit also employ child soldiers, on average two to three

times as many as groups that do not forcibly recruit” (Beber and Blattman, 2013, p.67). The recruitment of children should not be optimal for armed forces, adults should be, but without resources to encourage adults to join, they must target children.

There are an estimated 300,000 child soldiers worldwide, half of whom are in Africa. Demographically, half the population of Africa is under the age of eighteen, therefore this statistic makes sense (Peters and Richards, 1998; Twum-Danso, 2003). Vautravers (2008) offers an alternative explanation for the use of child soldiers, and their concentration in Africa: “newly independent states, having to come to terms with poverty, lack of skilled workers and technical expertise, as well as governance issues, can often not afford to mobilise adults in order to settle conflicts or wage their wars” (p.102-3), so they make use of children instead. It is primarily opposition and paramilitary forces that use child soldiers – not government forces (Russell and Gozdzia, 2006).

Children, often recruited through abduction, have been used in conflicts in Mozambique, where the war ran from 1976-1992 (Boothby, 2006). Throughout Burundi’s ten year civil, between 6,000 and 7,000 children were recruited by both the government and rebel forces, the majority joining voluntarily, but forced recruitment and abduction were still used (Jordans et al., 2012). The NRA was well known for its use of *kadogos* (child soldiers), recruiting an estimated 3,000 during the early 1980s (Cheney, 2005; Veale and Stavrou, 2003). During the Sierra Leonean civil war, all three warring factions recruited youth under the age of eighteen: the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), local civil defence forces (CDF), and the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (Williamson, 2006). Children were both voluntarily and forcibly recruited in Sierra Leone. Youth often joined civil defence groups, or the government forces, because the RUF attacks had disrupted their schooling (Peters and Richards, 1998). It is estimated that between 50% and 80% of the RUF were recruited when they were between the ages of 7 and 14, and 30% of this figure were girls (Peters and Richards, 1998; Twum-Danso, 2003). Unlike Uganda, however, one of the causes of Sierra Leone’s civil war were the reservoir of unskilled, unemployed and unemployable

youth, who had few options to participate gainfully in mainstream society, and who voluntarily chose to mobilise in rebellion (Peters, 2007).

The use of child rather than adult recruits holds good for the LRA as well. The Survey of War Affected Youth (SWAY), a survey of 1,018 household in northern Uganda conducted in 2006, calculates that 'at least 66,000' youth between the ages of 14 and 30 have been abducted in northern Uganda (Annan et al., 2008). LRA abduction is indiscriminate in every aspect other than age (Borzello, 2007). 65% of abductions by the LRA are of children or adolescents, and a youth aged between 12 and 14 is five times more likely to suffer abduction than someone aged either 9 or 25 (Annan, Blattman and Horton, 2006; Beber and Blattman, 2013; Blattman and Annan, 2008).

There are a number of reasons that previous research has suggested as to why children are preferable to forcibly recruit than adults. Children are small, obedient, and lack a fully developed sense of right and wrong and therefore can be trained. Children are more easily indoctrinated and controlled than adults (Blattman and Annan, 2010a). They are malleable, because they have not socialised into civilian norms before being abducted, so therefore have a much harder time reintegrating when they come back. They are also more expendable, meaning tactics can be riskier (Russell and Gozdzia, 2006). Beber and Blattman (2010) also point out that groups that rely on forced recruit tend to also abduct children, because it takes less effort, and they have a far lower ability to resist or escape. Furthermore, "it is seldom optimal for adults to be forcibly recruited" (Beber and Blattman, 2010, p.3), because the motivation to escape is far higher than for children.

The abduction of children can also have a far greater impact on the community: "The abduction and use of children to commit atrocities demoralises individuals, destabilises communities and ensures far greater control over populations than would be otherwise be militarily possible" (Maxted, 2003, p.61). It can be considered a tactic to exert control over the civilian population, especially when it is there children that are being abducted and used to terrorise them.

Young adolescents also more frequently report feeling loyalty to the group that abducted them, which may account for their high numbers in rebel groups (Annan, Blattman and Horton, 2006). Ozerdem and Podder (2011) explain that, unlike adults, youth come to depend on commanders for protection and patronage, and therefore are far more easily socialised into the group.

The nature of modern day intrastate conflict has meant that children are more able to contribute. In low intensity warfare there are more non-combative tasks to be fulfilled, which children can easily carry out, such as being porters, cooks and construction workers (Gates, 2011; Russell and Gozdziaik, 2006). The availability and use of small arms – a result of the post-Cold War era – mean that children can be used in warfare – prior to such technological developments, children could not carry or operate the heavy weaponry (Peters and Richards, 1998; Veale and Stavrou, 2003). Given this, there have a host of new international laws and regulations against the enlistment, conscription and use of child soldiers, plus two high-profile cases of prosecution – Thomas Lubanga in the Hague and Charles Taylor at the Special Court for Sierra Leone. Western governments have also limited or denied aid to governments that use teenaged soldiers. This is all designed to make the use of child soldiers costlier (Beber and Blattman, 2013). Kony and two of his deputies have been indicted by the International Criminal Court for the enlistment of child soldiers (ICC, 2005).

Despite the correlation between coercive recruitment and child soldiering, children sometimes choose to join armed groups; they are not always coerced into joining. Research tends to focus on the pull factors in the decision to join, whereas push factors, such as protection from violence may be a factor to join (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008). Some children may join militias for protection – as they have a better chance of surviving a conflict in the armed group than out of it, especially in situations where civilians are targeted (Maxted, 2003). War can provide opportunities that civilian life does not, such as an education and a job, a family and sense of protection, as well as power and prestige (Baines, Harris and McCleery, 2010), or it simply is how they can best meet their basic needs, such as for food and shelter (Wessells, 2002). For example, most Sierra Leonean youth saw education as the ‘key to success’ – there were not that many

opportunities to succeed prior to the war, due to lack of schools and school fees. Only 55% of primary school-age children were enrolled in school on 1990, the year before war broke out, and many parents could not afford the school fees (Betancourt et al., 2008). The war itself destroyed schools and the crops used to pay school fees, so education became even harder to acquire. Joining the military at least provided some sort of financial security for youth. In Sierra Leone there were many youth who voluntarily joined militias. They were not brainwashed or indoctrinated – they made rational choices in the face of few other viable options (Peters, 2004). Another motivation for Sierra Leonean youth who took up arms and joined a militia was in revenge for relatives who had been killed by the opposing side (Peters and Richards, 1998). A study in Burundi found that the reasons given for youth voluntarily joining an armed group included material gain (32.6%), the influence of peers (13%) and prestige (13.5%) (Jordans et al., 2012).

But some scholars, such as Machel (2001) and Singer (2006), argue that children's 'voluntary' recruitment is rarely truly voluntary, and is rather a response to external pressures, such as poverty, and is a means of survival. Children who are voluntarily recruited are often vulnerable because they tend to be poor and disadvantaged, they are living in the conflict zone and or their family background is disrupted (Twum-Danso, 2003). Research of participation in rebel groups has found that there is not much difference between those who were coerced into joining and those who did so voluntarily (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008), but no research has addressed why this should be the case.

### **6.3. Why They Stay**

Motivating a forced recruit to participate in the rebel group is problematic, as he or she has no incentive to stay with the rebels. The forced recruit would be expected to leave at the first possible opportunity. So why do so many stay? According to prior research, rebel groups resort to initiation techniques in order to control the behaviour of forced recruits, and compel them to stay and fight. Initiation is a process of socialisation into the norms and violence of the rebel

group (Russell and Gozdziaak, 2006). Violence, fear and punishment are all part of the socialisation process (Vermeij, 2009) – it has been termed as “initiation through traumatising” (Vinci, 2005, p.371). Previous research has documented that abducted people are forced to commit atrocities against their family or community in order to ‘burn bridges’ and make it harder to return, for fear of retribution (Amone-P’Olak, 2007), which serves to bind them to the group. They become dependant on the group (Matxed, 2003). Bevan, however, argues that these forced atrocities “lower the relative opportunity cost of membership” (2007, p.344) for recruits, meaning that it is not so costly to stay with the group.

Within the LRA, previous studies have outlined the violent initiation that they credit with making the forced recruits stay with the group. “After abduction, the boys’ priority was to safeguard their lives through constant vigilance and fleeing whenever an opportunity presented itself” (Amone-P’Olak, 2007, p.650). Abductees would be forced to kill or maim fellow abductees or civilians, participate in combat, and raid and loot from the local populace; for women, many were forced into ‘marriages’ with rebel commanders as soon as they reached puberty, and subject to repeated rapes, and subsequent pregnancy and giving birth in the bush (Carlson and Mazurana, 2008; Moscardino et al., 2012). This all serves to break down psychological defences, raise the likelihood of retaliation from their community should they return and desensitise them to violence. Findings from the Survey of War Affected Youth reveals that 12% of abductees reported that they had been forced to beat someone, and 8% claimed that they were forced to kill someone close to them. A quarter of those taken for longer than two weeks said that they had been forced to kill a civilian or enemy soldier (Annan, Blattman and Horton, 2006). Nevertheless, that is a relatively small number of recruits to have reported participating in these violent initiation rituals – less than one in twelve recruits killed someone close to them, and only one in eight had had to beat another person, which raises the question of how the LRA is succeeding in initiating the rest of the recruits. This brutal and violent initiation has been reported in other rebel groups, too. Sierra Leone’s RUF initiated the youth it abducted by forcing them to commit violence against their family or community in order to sever such ties (Denov, 2010). Former child soldiers in Mozambique

also reported being abused or tortured after being abducted (Boothby, 2006). By contrast, my sample did not report violence at the time of abduction beyond the act of abduction itself. This is a departure from the current literature, and brings into contention the claim in the previous research that violence at the time of abduction is the reason that abductees remain with the group.

The initiation is not just violent: the LRA also exerts control over forced recruits through the adoption of familiar societal structures. School is one structuring feature, and the commanders often call themselves *lapwony* (teacher) (Justice and Reconciliation Project, 2008). “The LRA also maintains control over children by using the idiom of family to hierarchically structure their society” (Cheney, 2005, p.34). It has been reported that each abductee is allocated to a family, headed by a commander (Amnesty International, 2007; (Baines, 2009). Denov (2010) found in her study of former child soldiers in Sierra Leone that RUF officers would offer patronage to some of the children they abducted which helped them ‘become RUF’ – indoctrinating them into the rebel group. Boys then became dependent on these commanders that they came to view as a father figure, and eventually came to see the RUF as a surrogate family (Maclure and Denov, 2006). Gates (2011) elaborated on this phenomenon, stating that within the RUF, this paternal bond creates loyalty that binds the child to the group, and this familial structure creates a sense of security that would otherwise be absent. Pye’s (1971) study of warlords in China found that loyalty would be based upon a teacher-student relationship.

The initiation also encompasses a militarisation process. Veale and Stavrou (2003) found that abductees were forced into a new identity – that of a soldier – and many related that this was a difficult transition, which they initially resisted. The uniform was a powerful symbol of this new identity. There were rewards to accepting the new identity of soldier: they could expect to be beaten and less, and would get a gun. Some abductees are given military training, others are taught to do domestic jobs – but all are contributing to the group (Vermeij, 2011).

What is unique about the LRA's reported initiation process is that drugs are not used as they have been with other rebel groups (Vinci, 2005). For example, Sierra Leone's RUF used drugs and alcohol to break down the resistance and inhibitions of its abductees (Denov, 2010; Williamson, 2006). Alcohol and drugs also served to numb the fear and pain experienced throughout the initiation (Maclure and Denov, 2006; Wessells, 1997). Youth combatants were given marijuana, crack cocaine, injections of amphetamines and forced to ingest gunpowder to prepare for battle, and reportedly some atrocities were committed under the influence of drugs (Peters and Richards, 1998). Vinci (2005) has argued that the initiation process for abductees within the LRA sufficiently traumatises them that they could be controlled without drugs. But it is important to note that the LRA did not seek merely to control its abductees. The LRA, after all, does not abduct children for any other reason than to have them further the objectives of the LRA, fighting as soldiers, working for soldiers, or becoming 'wives' to commanders. In short, it requires them to become part of the LRA. This requires more than traumatised children. The LRA requires soldiers who will actively participate in fighting, looting, and abducting, soldiers who will be brave, soldiers who will follow commands, and command others, in order to function properly as an army. Beating and terrorising a recruit into submission does not create a good soldier, and certainly does not motivate a recruit to advance within the group, nor does it equip them with the skills to do so. This brutal initiation process reported in previous research is incompatible with the subsequent rise that some of these recruits – like ICC indictee Dominic Ongwen – display. Further research is required to uncover how the LRA gets recruits to stay that also explain why some recruits actively rise to command positions.

#### **6.4. Retention of Forced Recruits**

With voluntary recruits, prior research has examined the positive incentives to stay, and the disincentives to leave. Material and pecuniary incentives are the primary motivators for participation (Grossman, 1999), but selective violence, in the form of punishment, can also act as an incentive (Blattman and Miguel, 2010). Gates (2011) argues that the retention and



compliance of forced recruits is achieved through the threat of punishment, pecuniary benefits – such as loot or wages – non pecuniary benefits – such as security or a sense of community, and finally through socialising and indoctrinating recruits into not leaving.

The retention of forced recruits has also been attributed to nothing more than the paralysing effect of violence: “the most apparent reason why the abducted children stayed in the LRA seems to be because of the use of brute force and intimidation by superior commanders. By imposing high costs on disobedient behaviour, such as severe punishment or even death, children had no choice but to remain” (Haer, Banholzer and Ertl, 2011, p.422). This seems over-simplistic, especially given that many forced recruits do actually leave. Gates (2011) has argued that for groups that use abduction, violence is very important in order to achieve compliance and cooperation. The threat of violence is an effective tool to control behaviour, and indiscriminate violence can create a climate of fear, and sends a signal to recruits about the costs of desertion (Weinstein, 2005).

The LRA has a disincentive structure in order to motivate recruits to behave and participate (Bevan, 2007). Blattman and Annan (2010a) suggest that this is done through a mixture of incentives, such as food or future gains, and violence. Vermeij (2011) identifies getting rank as a motivation to fight, because promotion gives an abductee power and control. Of course, the abductee has to do something proactive in order to attain rank to begin with, suggesting that rank is given as a reward for allegiance, rather than to inspire it.

A militarisation process has been reported in other rebel groups, whereby forced recruits are made into soldiers and develop an identity as a fighter. This process involved physical and ideological training to assist with the identity transition, along with the severing of ties to their old lives and identities, which is done through violence (Denov, 2010; Macure and Denov, 2006). Drugs, too, were part of desensitising recruits so that they could and would participate in the violence (Wessells, 1997). Once child soldiers have participated in violence – especially if it is against their own family or community – they are told that they

can never return home because of the consequences that they would face (Wessells, 2002). Ultimately this militarisation process is reported to result in forced recruits internalising the rules and norms of the rebel group, which is why they stay and participate (Gates, 2002).

Despite the seemingly coercive techniques of initiation, the LRA does appear to inspire loyalty amongst forced recruits. Blattman and Annan (2010a) found in SWAY, 19% admitted at one point they had wanted to stay with the group, and 9% aspired to be commanders. Elsewhere, they report that in the same survey, 44% former combatants said that they felt an allegiance to the group, and even after leaving the LRA, 0.5% still felt that way. Of those whose abduction lasted over two weeks, 40% reported feeling that they were an important part of the LRA (Annan, Blattman and Horton, 2006). Allen and Schomerus (2006) also found that some of former abductees they talked to spoke of the LRA in a positive manner, leading them to conclude “the LRA has been effective at imbuing recruits with its values” (p.v). Within the RUF, Denov (2010) argues that child soldiers became desensitised to violence, and this led to their participation, and that small arms gave child soldiers power that also contributed to feelings of loyalty towards the group.

Gates (2002) points out that strong bonds would develop between soldiers who lived together day in and day out and faced life threatening situations, and elsewhere suggests that it is the process of socialisation that creates a sense of allegiance to the group, which is why people continue to participate in the group (Gates, 2011). Socialisation causes people to internalise their norms and rules of an organisation. The spiritual aspect of the LRA is an important part of socialisation for the LRA. A culture of fear is also very productive in terms of socialisation (Gates, 2011). Vermeij (2011) also claims that it was through a process of socialisation that the LRA managed to get recruits to be loyal and remain with the group. This socialization process that normalizes violence is why forced recruits stay, because it is “designed to foster extreme powerlessness” (Veale and Stavrou, 2007, p.286).

The socialization argument has received mixed support in the literature. Akello, Ritchers and Reis (2006) suggest that forced recruits in the LRA are successfully socialized into violence stating that more than 70% of juvenile offenders in Gulu district were former child soldiers, who had been imprisoned on charges of rape, theft and assault. Blattman and Annan (2008) dispute this, however, claiming that former forced recruits do not display more violence than their non-abducted counterparts.

According to the results of SWAY, among those that stayed with the LRA longer the six months, 54% were given a rank (Annan, Blattman and Horton, 2006). Killing is reported to be the primary means of gaining status in the LRA, as well as going to the front line (Human Rights Watch, 2003). This is because it demonstrates loyalty to the LRA and their cause, and partly because it means the recruit cannot go home (Baines, 2009). Promotion is also associated with skill and obedience (Annan, Blattman and Horton, 2006).

Within the RUF, promotion was a reward, which reinforced allegiance to the group (Denov, 2010). Promotion could be achieved through being aggressive, and successfully looting and abducting: “promotion to the rank of commander was deemed to be the pinnacle of success. A source of privilege as well as pride, to be a commander meant being allowed to lead units of other child combatants and to have sexual licence over women and girls” (Maclure and Denov, 2006, p.128).

According to what little research there is on gaining rank within the LRA, the benefits of gaining ranks include: “access to food and shelter, knowledge and information, escorts and spies for protection, *ting ting* (girls who are immature, such as those who have not yet menstruated) for domestic service and forced ‘wives’ for domestic service, sexual gratification and the production of children for status” (Baines, 2009, p.173). The importance attached to ranks is reflected Allen and Schomerus’ (2006) report that even in the reception centre, hierarchies of the LRA were replicated, with those who had had a higher rank speaking first. Gaining rank gives the person status, which is still respected even after he or she has left the group.

Gaining a rank is viewed as an incentive to stay within a rebel group: “it was gainful for a male to rise in rank as it meant more loot, provisions and, perhaps also as incentive to fight bravely and encourage loyalty, more wives” (Annan et al., 2008, p.41). Rising through the ranks would give a recruit access to resources, power and women (Pham et al., 2005). Men were given a woman as a ‘wife’ as a reward, which was proof of status and an incentive to fight for the LRA (Amnesty International, 2007). Education and physical attractiveness were desirable characteristics that LRA commanders wanted in a ‘wife’, as they wanted someone who was literate and could write down radio codes (Annan et al., 2008; Carlson and Mazurana, 2008).

Utas, in his research in Liberia, points out that some recruits could benefit from participating in a rebel group: “war can be socio-economically empowering for young marginalised people...and active participation in war can be preferable to passive life in a refugee camp” (2005, p.426-7). Commanders can expect to benefit economically from war, but rank and file soldiers rarely do, and even then, it is short-term gains. But these marginal benefits to rank do not offer adequate explanation as to why staying was more beneficial than leaving and returning to civilian life, where they could also access many of the same things, such as food, shelter and a wife.

More mundanely, some research has suggested that forced recruits stay simply because they have nothing to go back to. Reintegration is problematic for many former abductees as they face stigmatisation and ostracisation in their community for having been a part of LRA (Corbin, 2008). There is a common perception within communities that ‘a child is abducted but a rebel returns’ (Akello, Ritchers and Reis, 2006).

Forcibly abducted children, however, may be more likely to stay with a rebel group because, unlike adults, they are more vulnerable outside the rebel group. Furthermore, orphaning and poverty seemed to influence the child soldier to stay longer with the LRA (Blattman and Annan, 2010a). Age is related to the desire to stay or escape – mid teens are the ones who reported wanting to stay or

feeling loyalty, whereas the young and those in their twenties would escape (Beber and Blattman, 2013).

But these explanations do not account for the fact that the vast numbers of abductees ultimately do escape. Retention is not entirely effective: according to results from the SWAY data, only 20% of abductees stayed with the rebels for more than a year, while only 5% remained with them for more than three years (Blattman and Annan, 2008). Escape is not the only threat to retention within the LRA. Annan et al. (2008) estimate that 20% of male and 5% of female abductees are dead. Blattman and Annan (2010b) estimate that 1,000 abducted youth (1%) stayed with the LRA, the rest die, escape or are rescued. Current explanations for retention do not address subsequent desertion, which clearly is a significant problem for the LRA.

## **6.5. Why They Leave**

Desertion must be explained in order to fully comprehend the process of retention and advancement of forced recruits, as an explanation needs to encompass both the retention and desertion of forced recruits. Scholars who claim that forced recruits stay because of successful indoctrination fail to account for the reasons that the majority of them do eventually leave the group. Scholars who attribute the decision to stay merely to the fear of violence and retaliation do not explain the advancement within the group of these people, nor the reason they stay for as long as they do.

Desertion and noncompliance are disastrous for a violent group. Desertion is problematic not only because it depletes manpower for the group, but also because the deserter may be able to reveal information about the group – such as location, tactics or leadership – to the enemy. In legitimate armies, desertion is treated as a very serious offence, and dealt with severely. For groups that recruit through abduction desertion is a serious concern (Gates, 2011). In the SWAY study, when former abductees were asked why they had not tried to escape sooner, the main reasons given were lack of opportunity (36%),

some said they were guarded (24%), some were simply too scared (17%), and 9% had been relocated to Sudan, which made successful escape difficult (Annan, Blattman, and Horton, 2006). The same study found that the decision came as a moment of 'awakening' and was not a long thought out process (Annan, Blattman and Horton, 2006).

The length of time an abductee stayed with the LRA was not always that long. Results from the Survey of War Affect Youth estimate that 28% of male abductions and 39% of female abductions lasted less than 2 weeks, and that nearly 11% of male and 20% of female abductions last one to three days. These estimates include those who have not returned (Annan et al., 2008). Blattman and Annan (2010a) estimate that four-fifths of abducted youth return home: 81% escape, 15% are released and 5% are rescued. The rest either die or remain with the group. Even escape is not a guarantee of safety: some have been abducted more than once (Allen and Schomerus, 2006), and some choose to rearm, either because of the adverse conditions they return to, and the opportunities that rearming presented (Baines, Harris and McCleery, 2010)

Escape is "the ultimate expression of resistance and agency in a context designed to foster extreme powerlessness" (Veale and Stavrou, 2007, p.286), and calls into question the assertions that forced recruits are indoctrinated and forced to stay in the group because of the disabling effect violence has on them. Escape – and getting back home – also demonstrate remarkable resilience on the part of the forced recruits, as they risked death if caught (Chrobok and Akutu, 2008). This again suggests that violence had not had such a powerful hold over the abductees as prior research would suggest. An understanding of retention and advancement requires both an explanation of why forced recruits stay, and why they leave.

## **6.6. Agency**

In Uganda, there has been a global response to the war, in that other countries have become involved in both the military efforts and peace processes.

Sudan was directly involved in the military campaign, first in their capacity arming the LRA, then in their joint initiative with the UPDF to hunt down the LRA during Operation Iron Fist. Sudan also hosted (and acted as mediator) during the Juba Peace Talks in 2006. The foreign aid that Uganda has attracted to fight the rebels, the World Bank grant to rebuild the infrastructure of the north that prompted the disastrous Operation North of 1991, and the arrival of 100 American soldiers in 2011 sent to 'kill or capture' Kony, and failed to do either, all illustrate the international involvement in Uganda's war (BBC News, 14th October 2011; Dolan, 2005; Human Rights Watch, 1997). But perhaps the most enduring emblem of international presence in the conflict are the reception centres. Without a formal DDR process established in the north, the role of reintegrating the LRA returnees has fallen to local and international charities. American-run World Vision and Ugandan-run GUSCO are the two main reception centres in Gulu.

Once they have returned, about 50% of abductees go through reception centres as part of the informal DDR process (Annan et al., 2008). These are generally geared towards former child soldiers, and emphasise their victimhood. The World Vision centre's counselling focuses on encouraging the child soldiers to talk about what they did in the bush, and then telling them it was not their fault as they were abducted, and advises them to forget about it: "by stressing the fact that the children were abducted, and thus forced to commit their horrendous acts, their essential innocence is emphasised throughout the reintegration process" (Akello, Ritchers and Reis, 2006, p.234). Even these admissions of participation are framed within a dialogue of blamelessness. Not holding children responsible for their actions is a legal concept. Those under the age of eighteen are not held legally responsible, and many reintegration efforts likewise ignore any accountability on the part of the child, but they are not necessarily guilt-free (Harris, 2010). Presenting former rebels as victims also justifies them as recipients of international and national aid.

Treating them as victims, many studies have looked at the psychological trauma returnees – specifically children – have suffered as a result of their time in the LRA (for example, Amone-P'Olak, 2007; Klasen et al., 2010; Moscardino et

al., 2012), tallying up the percent of former abductees who have witness or have participated in atrocities (Derulyn et al., 2004; Pham et al., 2005; Vindevogel et al., 2011). The psychological dimension of abduction has been studied at length, with a plethora of researchers examining the psychological impact of abduction and participation in terms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety. In research on the LRA and child soldiers in other African conflicts, child soldiers consistently have higher scores of psychological distress than their never-abducted counterparts (e.g. see Annan et al., 2006; Pfeiffer and Elbert, 2011), although Wainryb (2011) points out that PTSD is a medical model designed to measure distress from victims of violence, not perpetrators, so these psychological instruments may not capture the true impact of these experiences.

But it has been pointed out that even those who were abducted as a child do not necessarily fit the narrative of trauma or victim (Mergelsberg, 2010). This is not to say that they do not suffer trauma from their time in the bush, but it does ignore the fact they demonstrate and exercise agency. Mergelsberg (2010) did 6 months of fieldwork in northern Uganda, focused on four main participants, and found that former abductees were not helpless “While my informants may well have fitted into the category of a helpless child at the moment of their abduction, most of them returned as young adults with certain capacities, a sense of independence and self-esteem, and more or less clear reasons as to why they were fighting with the LRA” (p.167).

Abductees have been noted to be stronger and more confident than their never abducted counterparts – the experiences in the bush and their successful escape have given them confidence and leadership abilities (Veale and Stavrou, 2003). Likewise, abduction increases political engagement – former abductees were more likely to vote (Blattman and Annan, 2008). The former child soldiers themselves did not see themselves as innocent either; some even reported incidents where they could have let a captive live, but chose to kill them anyway. Some commanders let the younger soldiers decide whether to kill captives or not (Akello, Ritchers and Reis, 2006). Maclure and Denov (2006) report that the force recruits of the RUF experienced a sense of power from killing and maiming. In the RUF, Maclure and Denov (2006) report that forced recruits exhibited some



degree of agency in that some boys resisted the RUF's norms, by not ingesting drugs, not shooting the enemy in battle and by running away, while others chose to embrace the violence, demonstrating that to some extent, these abductees had choice. The fact that some boys resisted, and some actively embraced the violence, shows that they had some degree of agency.

Women, especially, are presented as lacking agency, with their role within the LRA presented merely as sexual slaves, forced into 'marriage' with a commander, and to a lesser extent, domestic servant (Carlson and Mazurana, 2008; McKay, 2004). While there is no doubt that women are subject to horrific victimisation during their time with the rebels, virtually nothing has been written about their roles as fighters, even commanders. Annan et al. (2008) acknowledge that women were combatants, not just sex slaves or domestic workers. In the discourse on forced abduction, "girls become personified as voiceless victims, often devoid of agency, moral conscience and economic potential" (Denov, 2010, p.13). Denov (2010) states that women in the RUF would seek to gain power and protect themselves from outside sexual abuse through 'marriage' to a commander. Sexual relations within the LRA are heavily regulated, whereby a man can only have sex with his 'wife', so sexual abuse of abductees is limited to forced marriage. McKay (2004) too, states that marriage to a commander meant that a woman could gain authority in her own right. In Liberia, women would voluntarily become the girlfriends of soldiers in order to gain protection or economic security. The rebels, who mainly hailed from rural, less developed areas, saw it as a status symbol to have many girlfriends, as they saw 'strongmen' in their villages do (Utas, 2005).

Prior research has failed to give a satisfactory explanation for why forced recruits stay with the group that abducted them, and this is in part because they have denied the role of social agency. The reasons proffered for abductees to comply with the group have been attributed to pure violence, of which they are both a victim and a perpetrator, albeit against their will. While some researchers have chosen to look at the psychological impact of this, in terms of testing for post-traumatic stress disorder, researchers have not suggested that this level of violence has created learned helplessness, trauma bonding, or Stockholm

Syndrome. Instead, it is claimed that this just creates compliance, and some researchers have gone further and state that it is part of a socialisation process (Gates, 2011; Vermeij, 2009), to explain why the abductees stay and fight with the group. This, in turn, does not explain why they then choose to desert, as the majority eventually do.

The LRA has managed to endure despite being almost entirely made up of forced recruits. It must have some means of encouraging conformity to the group, because people do not take advantage of every opportunity to leave. Violence is not enough to explain adherence and perhaps even allegiance to the group. Some abductees, as ICC indictee Dominic Ongwen and Thomas Kwoyelo demonstrate, actively embrace their role as a rebel, and rise through the ranks to command positions. The reasons for this rise have never been adequately addressed by prior research. Some have suggested what the marginal benefits of rank are, in terms of access to food and women, but this does not seem to be enough of an incentive to stay, in order to rise. Loyalty has been attributed to a socialisation process, but that does not explain why abductees – including the commanders – do leave. The LRA finds a way to retain its forced recruits, and provide a structure that allows, and more importantly, encourages abductees to advance, but that ultimately does not provide enough incentive or loyalty to stay indefinitely with the group. This research seeks to uncover what these mechanisms are.

## **7. Methods**

This study uses in-depth interviews with twenty former members of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) to understand retention and advancement in a group whose almost sole method of recruitment has been abduction. Because of the issues of gaining access to hidden populations, my research – like much other research on rebel groups (see Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008) – is qualitative, and involved interviewing a small number of former members of the LRA, as well as ethnographic observations during my time in the field. Qualitative methods are appropriate to investigate the research questions, because my aim is to understand the experiences of people who had been abducted and rose through the ranks of the LRA.

### **7.1. Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study is to understand why some abductees advance through the ranks within the LRA, and others do not, through an examination of both the structure of the LRA and the agency of the abductee. A secondary aim is to understand the endurance of the LRA over the past twenty-seven years, given that the vast majority of its fighters are forcibly abducted. The research questions are:

- 1) How does the LRA retain forced recruits?
- 2) What role does the spiritual aspect of the group play?
- 3) Why do forced recruits advance within the LRA?
- 4) How do forced recruits contribute to the endurance of the LRA?

The Lord's Resistance Army currently is comprised almost entirely of abductees – 90%, according to some estimates (Moscardino et al., 2012; Talwar, 2004). Some abductees have succeeded in advancing within the ranks of the LRA to command positions, where they commit the very atrocities of which they were a victim. Previous research has almost exclusively treated former abductees as victims, but has never addressed those who actively embraced their new role as a rebel. This research seeks to explain advancement amongst abductees, including why they stayed and how they rose through the ranks, in comparison to others who did not or could not advance. Comprehending the command structure and opportunities for advancement within the LRA, and retention and desertion is important to explain the endurance of the LRA. The goal of this research is to understand social agency, and the LRA is a case study in order to shed light on this larger dynamic.

A case study involves the in-depth investigation into a phenomenon using multiple methods of data collection over a period of time with the goal of providing a description and explanation of a phenomenon (Berg, 2009; Stake, 1995). Using a case study approach allows the researcher to “understand a real-life phenomenon in depth... (and) encompasses important contextual conditions” (Yin, 2009, p.18). The LRA is an instrumental case study (Stake, 2005), in that the findings can be applied to other similar cases because the case possesses similar characteristics to other rebel groups. Several other rebel groups have used similar tactics to the LRA, namely forced abduction, such as the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone (Denov, 2010), the Mozambique National Resistance Army (Boothby, Crawford and Halerpin, 2006), Forces Nationales de Liberation in Burundi (Jordans et al., 2012), and various rebel groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Eriksson Baaz and Stern, 2008; Rakisits, 2009).

## **7.2. Research Approval**

In order to conduct the research I had to negotiate both the formal process of getting research permission and the informal process of getting access to the

desired population. I received Research Ethics Board approval for the project from the Simon Fraser University Office of Research Ethics in January 2013. I then had to apply for formal research clearance in Uganda. The prerequisite for applying for research clearance in Uganda is that the researcher has an affiliation with a local organisation, which transpired to be a frustrating and slow process. I eventually secured an affiliation with the Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR) at Makerere University in Kampala, the capital. The application required that a researcher at the Institute recommend me for the affiliation, to ensure the area of research matched with the Institute's. The affiliation fee was US\$300. The Institute then submitted the application for research clearance to the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST). Once research clearance was given, another fee of US\$300 had to be paid to UNCST. My project was given research clearance in July 2013. The affiliation with MISR also served to give the research – and the researcher – credibility in the eyes of the gatekeepers, and also served to reassure the participants to some extent that I was a genuine researcher.

### **7.3. Site**

The site for the study was Gulu town, in northern Uganda. Gulu is the biggest town in the north, located in Gulu district, and is home to the 4th Brigade of the Ugandan People's Defence Force (UPDF), and many a NGO and reception centre that cater to returnees. Gulu is located 332km from Kampala, about 71km from the Karuma Falls, the dividing line between the north and the south of the country. It is the home of the Acholi people, and the local language is Acholi, although it is often called Lwo (also spelt Luo) because it is very similar, and mutually intelligible with Lwo, the language of the neighbouring Langi people.

Gulu has been called the 'epicentre' of LRA activity, although the north has been free from rebel activity since 2006 (Dunson, 2008). During the worst of the rebel insurgency, Gulu hosted the infamous 'night commuters' – the children that would walk into the town from the surrounding villages to sleep there, in order to avoid being snatched from their beds in the middle of the night by the rebels

(Weber, Becker and Tate, 2003). During the conflict, Gulu town became the base for the government's counterinsurgency, and as such became the centre of the foreign aid and war economy in the region (Branch, 2008).

Gulu is not a big town, far less developed than Kampala, with a population of around 154,300 people, although it was designed to house only 40,000 (Branch, 2008; Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2011). The town boasts a university, several banks, and a branch of the Kenyan supermarket Uchumi. There are few cars on the roads, but plenty of bodabodas – motorcycle taxis – for which the only requirement to drive one seems to be being able to acquire one. The only indicator that this was a conflict zone only a few years ago is the host of signs for the international NGOs that clutter the town – World Vision, Save the Children, War Child Holland, Gulu Support the Children Organisation (GUSCO), and of course, Invisible Children – made famous, and somewhat unpopular in the region, as a result of their viral video, Kony2012. The barracks of the 4th Division of the UPDF is just outside of town, and it was they who had the responsibility of protecting the people of Acholiland during the LRA insurgencies into the area.

## **7.4. Access**

Getting access to a 'hidden population' – in this case, former rebels – presents issues, because the membership is not necessarily known and because privacy is often a concern, due to stigma or illegal activities, making them hard to locate (Heckathorn, 1997). While snowball sampling – whereby an initial sample is asked to refer further participants – has been advocated as a successful means of accessing a hidden population (for example, Atkinson and Flint, 2001; Griffiths et al., 1993), access was further complicated because I was an outsider, and was unable to initiate contact or gain the trust of an initial participant. Instead, I relied on gatekeepers to help me locate and access the hidden population. A gatekeeper acts as an intermediary between the researcher and those being researched (De Laine, 2000), and as such, controls access to the persons of interest. The gatekeeper facilitated physical access to the setting and the people, and key contacts then helped locate and approach potential participants, and also

acted as gatekeepers in that they had to vouch for me in order to gain the trust of the participants.

Through a contact in Kampala, I was able to meet with a key contact who gave me access to the Establishment<sup>12</sup> where commanders had returned to in Gulu. Once in Gulu, I contacted the Establishment, and the proprietor agreed to help me. Through this I was able to spend many hours at the Establishment, which protects the former commanders who cannot go back to their communities for fear of retaliation. Some commanders live there, and others just 'hang out' there. Through the Establishment, I was also able to access women, including female commanders and one of LRA leader Joseph Kony's former 'wives'. A friend who I had worked with when I interned in Kampala three years before put me in contact with a local NGO in Gulu, and through them, I was able to access lower ranking commanders.

Having gained physical access, there was also the issue of what has been termed 'social access' – gaining the acceptance of the participants (Cassell, 1988). Having contact with the group of interest is not enough; they have to be willing to talk to you, which requires trust and rapport (for example, see Adler and Adler, 1987; Sixsmith et al., 2003). The relationship with the gatekeeper can be helpful in gaining social access – the former LRA commanders trusted me because of my contact in Kampala – but the gatekeeper cannot compel the participants to trust you or talk to you (Clark, 2011). As such, gaining acceptance, and securing the trust of the participants was paramount, and the gatekeepers once again had the role of facilitating this by vouching for me. I also spent time at the Establishment, at the invitation of the proprietor, as immersion in the setting helps to build rapport and trust (Emmel et al., 2007).

Another obstacle to conducting research in northern Uganda is the fact that the region has played host to a plethora of previous researchers, as well as journalists and aid workers. Groups or communities that have been subject to repeated research can develop what has been termed 'research fatigue' (Moore,

<sup>12</sup> To protect identities, I do not name the places through which I gained access.

1996). Research fatigue is when participants, groups or communities tire of being researched, and as such are reluctant to be involved in further research (Clark, 2008). When repetitive and frequent research intrusions bring no tangible results to the people being studied, especially marginalised groups or communities that have suffered some form of crisis, such as civil war, participants can be left feeling exploited and angry (Sukarieh and Tannock, 2013). Prior research in the area thus can act as a hindrance to future research, as well as raising issues as to the ethics of conducting further research.

Previous research on the conflict in northern Uganda addresses the issues of conducting interviews with a population that has already been subject to interventions and research by NGOs and foreigner researchers. Many researchers have documented the disillusionment Ugandans have felt towards ineffectual NGOs, and researchers who come and go, without effecting any change. Branch (2011) records the exploitation felt by former members of the LRA towards NGOs, stating that during his research “many returnees only agreed to be interviewed once they were convinced that my research team and I were not an NGO” (p.136). Maeland acknowledges “it is indeed challenging for a researcher to justify to do research with vulnerable people who too often have hosted researchers without seeing any significant improvement of their lives” (2010, p.2). To address this, I followed Peterson (1999) suggestion of making the purpose of the research clear, and ensuring I was not asking the same questions asked in previous research, by reviewing what prior researchers had done. I also made clear from the onset of the interview that there would be no direct benefit to the participants in agreeing to do the interview, and reiterating that they are free to choose not to participate, or to withdraw their participation at any time, should they wish to.

I found that the main obstacle to gaining social access was not disillusionment, but the fact that former members of the LRA, especially the high ranking former commanders, were very distrustful of white researchers, because of the belief that we were all working for the International Criminal Court (ICC). This is where key contacts became invaluable in not only locating suitable participants, but also in assuring them that I was not, in fact, working for the ICC.



## 7.5. Sample

The participant group is former members of the Lord's Resistance Army who have taken up the Government amnesty and returned to their communities. The sample was purposive, with participants selected based upon their prior involvement in a rebel group. The criteria for selection was that they be over the age of nineteen, had been part of the Lord's Resistance Army, and had received a rank during their time with the rebel group. I originally set out to interview seven commanders and seven abductees who had not received a rank. From newspaper reports on high ranking LRA returnees, I identified seven former commanders, and planned to match non-commanders based on age at time of abduction and length of abduction. But it proved very difficult to find people who had spent more than six months within the LRA without receiving a rank. Instead, I abandoned plans to interview people who had not received a rank, and instead interviewed those who had one rank and had not advanced beyond that, although I did end up interviewing one woman who had not received a rank. There was also the problem of people pretending to have been part of the LRA, for the purpose of getting money from the NGOs that help returnees. I understood that false claims tended to be for shorter abductions, and therefore I was wary of recruiting participants who allegedly had been with the LRA a short time or had not received a rank because I would be unable to verify whether they had been with the LRA. I had not anticipated these false claims, but was warned by my key contacts to be wary.

A criterion that proved redundant was that participants must have been forcibly recruited. While abduction has always been a method of recruitment for the LRA, becoming the sole means in 1994 (Lomo and Hovil, 2004), at the inception of the LRA in the late 1980s, former Uganda National Liberation Army soldiers had voluntarily joined what was then known as the Lord's Salvation Army (Behrend, 1999a; Gersony, 1997). Nevertheless, all my participants – even those who had joined in the late 1980s – claimed to have been abducted, and I had no way of verifying otherwise. This was complicated by the fact that it was the top commanders who had been with the LRA since the late 1980s, so who may well

have joined through choice, but could have been motivated by fear of ICC prosecution to claim otherwise. Unable to verify, and unwilling to forgo these interviews, I abandoned this criterion for the sample, although it is a criterion all my participants claim to meet.

I had not planned to interview women because my focus was on commanders and advancement. The role of women in the LRA has been characterised in previous research as being 'forced wives' to commanders or domestic workers, such as cooks or porters (for example, see Carlson and Mazurana, 2008; Moscardino et al., 2012). While some research acknowledges that women's roles go beyond mere sex slaves, and that women were involved in fighting (see Annan et al., 2008), I found out that some women – admittedly few – had actually advanced within the LRA to command positions. In fact, it was very difficult to find someone who had spent any significant length of time with the LRA who had not got a rank, but some women went further, and managed to achieve command positions. This meant that I was able to record the perspectives of women, both commanders and non-commanders, in the research.

My sampling was also limited in that I only interviewed people who lived in and around Gulu town. I decided not to try and interview people in the surrounding villages because the only way to get to the villages was on a dreaded bodaboda motorbike taxi. Furthermore, people who had received ranks tended to return to Gulu town rather than the villages, as they were able to live in relative anonymity there (Branch, 2009).

As it transpired, sampling relied on key contacts to locate potential participants, and more importantly to vouch for me. But the downside of relying on key contacts was that I had little control over who they recruited, beyond outlining the criteria I was after and the goals of the research, and the sample hinged on who they knew and who they could persuade to talk to me. This was a limitation to the research, but is largely unavoidable when it comes to doing research on hidden populations as access through key contacts was the only way to be able to recruit participants.

The NGO was perhaps not the ideal organisation through which to seek participants because it is an NGO that assists those who need access to justice, rather than focusing solely on LRA returnees, and thus did not have the access to many suitable participants. Other researchers (for example, Akello, Ritchers and Reis 2006; Vindevogel et al., 2011) have accessed former LRA members through the reception centres that specifically help returnees, such as World Vision or GUSCO, which have far greater access to the population, but this has led to 'research fatigue' and a reluctance or outright refusal to continue to provide help to researchers. Other disadvantages to attempting to use these reception centres is firstly, the participants are more likely to have been exposed to prior research efforts, meaning they are less likely to be willing to be interviewed again (see Maeland, 2010), and relying on these organisations misses the estimated 50% of returnees who never do go through the reception centres (Annan et al., 2008).

I interviewed twenty former LRA members in total. Six were top commanders, although to protect their identity I have decided against revealing their ranks, but they were distinguishable as top commanders by the rank they had ascended to, which was verifiable through newspaper reports of their return, and by the fact that they had worked closely with the rebel leader, Joseph Kony, and had been part of the 'inner core' of the LRA. I interviewed a further eight men, three of whom had received only one rank, and the rest that had advanced beyond the first rank to mid-level command positions. I also interviewed six women – one of whom had received a mid-level rank, two more had been close to Kony, one in the capacity as his forced wife, and the second because she had been in the LRA since in the 1980s. One woman had been the wife of a commander and received no position or rank. The six top commanders and five women were recruited through the Establishment and eight men and one woman were recruited through the NGO.

In total, of the twenty people interviewed, five had low or no rank, nine were mid-ranking, holding a position of second lieutenant or lieutenant, having advanced from at least one lower rank, and six were high ranking. The age of abduction varied from nine years to thirty-five years, and length of time with the LRA varied from two years to twenty-four years, although it was hard to verify this,

and often participants would contradict themselves or give conflicting information as to age of abduction or length of time with the rebels. Other times, the numbers simply would not add up, or they would refer to an event that took place before they claimed to have joined, or stated they had been promoted by a commander who had died or left the LRA by the time they said they had joined. These discrepancies could be an issue of memory, especially after such a long period of time, or this could have been the result of 'tunnel memory' due to the emotional trauma that may well have been experienced as a result of abduction by the LRA (Safer et al., 1998).

When these inconsistencies or contradictions came up, I tried to clarify with the participant right away, as Taylor and Bogdan (1984) suggest. But, especially for the lower ranking commanders, it was virtually impossible to verify their accounts, and when the inconsistencies were not cleared up in the interview, I was unable to determine the reliability of what they were telling me. I had to determine whether they were purposefully misrepresenting themselves and whether one or two inconsistencies invalidated their entire story. In the end, I took what Flicker (2004) terms the 'sceptic' approach whereby I still included the inconsistent accounts in the analysis, but I took notice of what data I used from their accounts. Anything that I suspected might have been embellished, I chose not to use.

## **7.6. Data Collection**

The research was conducted over a period of four months, between July 2013 and October 2013. The data were primarily collected through in-depth interviews with the participants. Interviews are best suited to study a small number of participants to describe the phenomenon of rebel activity in a rich, detailed manner. The advantage of using interviews is that they generate in depth data, and offer flexibility, allowing the researcher to probe and follow up on the nuances of each person's story (Kvale, 2007).

The interviews were conducted in the garden of the Establishment or the NGO offices, with two exceptions: one participant requested the interview occur in a guesthouse restaurant, and one was conducted in another location<sup>13</sup>, where the participant was staying for his own protection.

At the start of the interview, I explained the informed consent procedure, specifically that they did not have to participate, and that refusal to participate would have no negative consequences for them; likewise, their consent to participate would not result in any benefits for them, beyond being able to talk about their experiences, and that they could withdraw their consent at any time without ramification. They were asked to give oral consent, in order to avoid making a written account of their name. I asked for permission to record the interview, explaining that only I would listen to the recording, transcribe it, eliminate any identifying information, and delete the recording. Only two refused to let me record the interview, and I took detailed notes throughout the interview instead.

The interviews tended to last one to two hours, although the longest interview spanned just over five hours. I conducted second interviews with three participants, after time constraints meant that the initial interview was cut short before they had finished telling me their story. The follow up interview was always at the suggestion of the participant and was held at a mutually agreed upon time and place.

All the participants were protected by the *Amnesty Act* of 2000, which states that any Ugandan who has engaged in 'war or armed rebellion' against the government since January 1986, when President Museveni took power, is granted amnesty on the condition they abandon rebellion. As such, the interviews did not pose much risk to the participants in talking about their time in the rebel group, but all precautions were taken to protect their confidentiality. All participants were assigned a pseudonym at the outset of the interview, which is used in the transcription and the write up.

<sup>13</sup> I do not disclose the location to protect the participant's identity.

Protecting the identity of the participants was paramount, as the top commanders, especially, expressed a lot of concern about possible ICC indictment. All, however, had received amnesty from the Government of Uganda, and none had been named in the 2005 ICC indictments against the top five commanders of the LRA. This concern seemed to stem more from a lack of understanding that the ICC only indicts the 'most responsible' people. Paradoxically, they were not concerned about prosecution at the national level. The Ugandan government has shown itself ready and willing to try former rebels, creating an International Crimes Division of the High Court, and unsuccessfully prosecuting former LRA Colonel Thomas Kwoyelo, who still remains incarcerated, in legal limbo, neither being granted amnesty nor facing criminal prosecution.

Confidentiality was also a more serious consideration for the top commanders, because they are more easily identifiable due to the limited number who have returned from the bush, and the media coverage their return attracted. As such, I do not identify which rank they received, only that they were high ranking. I also omit any identifying information that was also reported in the press and thus could be used to identify them, such as certain anecdotes, or aspects of their abduction, escape or capture.

I also avoided asking the commanders sensitive questions, such as whether they had committed any acts of violence during their time in the LRA, because I did not want to irritate or alienate participants. This helped to maintain a degree of trust, and ensured I would not have anything sensitive on record.

The interviews were semi-structured. I had an interview schedule, and I used it as a guide to help structure the interviews, but also ensured that the interview process remained flexible. I would start by asking the participants to tell me about their experiences in the LRA, and participants tended to be happy to tell their stories. From there, I would probe certain aspects of their story, ask for clarification, or ask follow up questions, depending on what they had told me. Areas of particular interest that I tried to ensure got addressed in all the interviews included how they joined the LRA, how they received a rank, why they stayed, how they left and their views or understanding of Joseph Kony – specifically the

spiritual or ideological aspect of the LRA. This approach ensured that I would be asking a number of the same questions to each participant, which meant that I had a level of standardisation across the interviews, but also meant I was able to respond to the participant's individual story.

Some participants, especially the top commanders simply did not answer a question if they did not like it – and having read some of the atrocities committed by the high ranking LRA, I did not push it. In order to verify something they had said, or to address an inconsistency without directly challenging the participant, I would ask the same question in a different way, usually without success. As Gurney (1991) points out, sometimes probing for more information is at the expense of maintaining a good working relationship with the participants, and I tended to favour maintaining the rapport I had by not pushing topics they were unwilling to discuss or clarify.

The flow of the interview was hindered somewhat by the cultural nuances to both my and the participants' speech. For example, many participants peppered their sentences with the word 'what', which was confusing, or would use a local word that was not easily translatable, such as 'Mzee' (a Swahili term of respect for an older man). Even though they were speaking English, their turn of phrase, and sometimes even just their accent, made it hard for me to understand what they meant. I would ask for clarification, or for them to repeat what they had said in these instances. Likewise, my accent and phrasing sometimes was difficult for them to understand, and I would have to rephrase questions, and talk slowly to be understood.

I did not pay participants for the interviews. This was, in some instances, problematic. One potential participant refused to be interviewed when he discovered he would not be getting paid – he seemed quite angry that I would be the only one getting the 'benefit' and there would be no benefit to him. I decided against offering any remuneration because I did not want it to act as an undue influence on the decision to participate, especially given the economic deprivation of the area, or to encourage people who perhaps did not fit the criteria to embellish or lie about their involvement in the LRA in order to make money. This

was a problem I was warned about. Branch (2008) also suggests that white people have been viewed as 'corrupting' Acholi society through their use of money. I also did not feel comfortable paying people who in some cases had committed atrocities, as some of the top commanders had allegedly done. I felt they should not financially benefit from what they had done. Furthermore, I found that participants were willing to be interviewed without the promise of pay. Nevertheless, several of the participants expected or asked for some kind of financial assistance, usually in the form of school fees for their children.

This in part came from the perception that *muno* (white people) are wealthy. According to one key contact, it is specifically returnees that have gone through the reception centres – which tend to be run by white people – who think white people are rich and therefore demand money. I made sure to emphasise that I was a student and unable to provide them with any financial assistance. Nevertheless, this did serve to highlight the fact that I was in a position of privilege because I am able to pursue higher education. I have never experienced growing up in a civil war; I come from a developed country, and I have the opportunity to pursue a doctoral degree, as well as being able to go to Uganda, and afford the fees associated with getting a research affiliation and permit. There was a clear power imbalance, especially given that I was working with people who are marginalised, and yet I often felt insecure, precisely because of my position as a white woman. I found that other people I came into contact with as a result of the research, not just my participants, would regularly ask for assistance, for money, or just make advances towards me. I deflected the requests and demands as best I could, but it left me feeling exposed. It is a generally held assumption in research that it is the participant who is the vulnerable party in the relationship, not the researcher (Ballamingie and Johnson, 2011), but as a young, white woman in a developing country, I often felt that the research put me in a more powerless position than it did the people I was interviewing.

A secondary method of data collection was through participant observation. I spent many hours at the Establishment, which was unplanned on my part, and resulted from invitations to come to the compound from the proprietor in charge, often with the promise of an interview participant who never



materialised. But this time gave me the opportunity to observe and interact with the former rebels who lived or hung out there in a natural setting. I gained insight into the day-to-day life and interactions of the former rebels. For example, I witnessed the close friendships between the former commanders. Moreover, telling things emerged during informal conversations, when the tape recorder was off. I would write up my observations in field notes after trips there. These field notes were used to supplement the information gathered through formal interviews. Ethnographic observations did not extend to lower ranking commanders because they did not congregate in one place as the top commanders did.

I took the role of participant as observer, where those being researched knew my identity as a researcher (Gold, 1958). Participant observation involved engaging in casual conversations and watching the interactions. Being an overt researcher allowed me to ask questions, but there is also the risk of the 'Hawthorne Effect' whereby my presence influenced how the participants acted (Berg, 2009). A very clear influence of my being there was that conversations were conducted in English, rather than the local language, Lwo.

As well as interviews and observations, I also used documents, such as newspaper reports, case files and previous research on the LRA to verify and corroborate what I had learnt. Becker (1970) pointed out that when studying deviant groups, one should not just rely on direct study, but should utilise indirect sources too. Multiple sources of data also assist to get a holistic picture of the phenomenon.

## **7.7. Leaving**

An important – and somewhat overlooked – aspect of fieldwork is deciding how and when to conclude the research (Gallmerier, 1991). According to Taylor, “a study is done when you have gained an understanding of the setting...that you set out to study” (1991, p.241). Ideally, I would have continued interviewing participants until saturation was reached, where new information was no longer

being provided, and interviewing more participants became redundant (Glaser and Strauss, 1999), as saturation is the ideal determinant of sample size (Josselson and Lieblich, 2003). But practical considerations precluded this. Firstly, there are a finite number of top commanders who had returned from the bush. Newspaper reports from the Ugandan media estimate that twenty top commanders have returned (Ojwee, 15th May 2012), but I was only able to identify the names of eight – one of whom, Thomas Kwoyelo is currently incarcerated at Luzira Prison. I was unable to locate another of the eight to interview. I stopped when I ran out of top commanders I could talk to and my contacts at the NGO were finding it harder to locate lower ranking former rebels willing to be interviewed. I had effectively exhausted access in Gulu. I did not, however, have a well thought out exit strategy. As recruiting participants was largely out of my hands, I did not have a clear timetable of how long I would remain in Gulu, or how many more interviews I could hope to conduct. I decided to go back to Kampala when it became apparent to me that recruiting suitable and willing participants was becoming hard and time consuming. This became problematic in that one of my contacts at the NGO was keen to keep finding me potential participants, but the reality was that he was having difficulty in doing this. My view of when the research was over was not the same as his, and as such, my departure seemed premature to him. At the Establishment, my contacts and participants accepted that I would not be able to talk to any more commanders, but wanted me to stay in Gulu nevertheless. I had not anticipated this – I had expected my key contacts and participants to have little interest in my presence, and so be somewhat indifferent to my departure. Participant observation, after all, is an intrusion into a person's life (Spradley, 1989).

When the departure is not viewed well by the participants, this can harm future research attempts (Gallmeier, 1991). Ultimately, I do not think I handled the situation as well as I could have; in future, I would have a clear plan of when I was going to leave the field, which I would communicate to my key contacts and participants from the start. I would also be careful to negotiate not just physical departure but emotional disengagement as well. While some researchers (Gallmeier, 1991; Roadbury, 1980) have discussed emotional difficulties for the

researcher in leaving the setting, I felt relieved to be returning to Kampala, but I was concerned about the impact it had on the people who had helped me.

I had originally planned to visit Kitgum and Lira – other towns in the north that had been affected by the LRA insurgency – but the top commanders had returned to Gulu. Furthermore I had established access and key contacts in Gulu, which I did not have in Kitgum or Lira. Without key contacts in other areas of the north to access participants, identifying and locating more people to interview would have been extremely difficult, and I would have had no way of verifying whether they had indeed been in the LRA, and likewise, they would have had no way of verifying who I was without someone to vouch for me. This is a limitation of doing research on a hidden population, where gatekeepers determine access. An outbreak of Crimean-Congo Haemorrhagic Fever in the region also discouraged me from travelling to these other towns. However, the twenty interviews that I did conduct were detailed and intensive, meaning that I gained a deep and broad understanding of the phenomenon.

## **7.8. Data Analysis**

Interview recordings were all transcribed verbatim, although I did not include the ums, ahs and pauses as I felt that these obstructed the narrative more than they helped it. In the two instances when participants refused to have the interview recorded, the interviews were written up from the notes I took during the interview, within an hour of its conclusion. All identifying information was omitted from the transcription. Transcription is a means of familiarising oneself with the data (Reissman, 1993), which Braun and Clark (2006) suggest that it is the first step in the analytic process of qualitative data.

The data were then coded using NVivo software, a qualitative data analysis program that allows the researcher to manually organise and code the text. Transcripts were uploaded into the program and coded. The analysis was done inductively, whereby I developed categories from the raw data. I did not apply themes or categories from previous research, but instead immersed myself

in the data from the twenty interviews, and identified codes from within the data. I used an opening coding technique as I went through the data. Open coding is defined as “the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorising data” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 61). The codes either related to the questions asked, or developed from the understanding of the research participants.

As new codes were identified, I went back over the data, applying the new codes and updating other codes as need be. All data chunks relevant to each particular code were coded. I then collated the codes, and identified the themes that underpin the coded categories, to identify patterns across the interviews. The themes were selective, according to the research questions. During the process, I made reflective notes about what I was learning from the data, and noted my thoughts and reactions.

In the write up of my results, I use the term interviewer to avoid confusing the reader, and the names of the speakers are all pseudonyms. I have quoted the participants exactly as they spoke, in order to faithfully represent the participant’s voice. This does mean that in some instances sentences are confusing or unclear and I have tried to explain what was meant. Local words that got used were left in, and the word ‘what’ is often used as a filler word, where the speaker is pausing, and the word has no meaning to the sentence. This may be confusing to readers, but is a cultural nuance, and I left it in, so as not to impose my own, Western culture on to the voices of my participants. When a participant changed topic mid-sentence, I use ‘—’ to denote that nothing has been cut from the narrative, and to indicate that the topic changed before the original sentence was finished. Where I have cut out a part of the narrative, I use ‘...’. In places, words or phrases were not audible in the recording of the interview, and I have put *inaudible*, in italics, in the place where what was said cannot be made out. Where I have removed identifying information, such as the name of a place or person, or a rank, I have put the missing term in italics, and in brackets, to signify that the term has been removed to protect the confidentiality of my participants. Within the stories, the names of recognisable LRA commanders

were left in to situate the account, but in no way compromise the confidentiality of any of my participants.

## **7.9. Verification**

I corroborated my results with literature on the LRA and other rebel groups, to verify their accounts. As well as academic literature, I was able to use national and international media reports of LRA activity, and reports specifically relating to some of the LRA commanders whom I interviewed. I was also able to find some media interviews that these commanders had given in the media after their return from the bush, which I could compare to the accounts that they had given me, to verify background information such as length of time with the LRA, rank, or age, and to look out for any accounts that diverged from what they had told me.

A method for ensuring rigour and trustworthiness of qualitative research is member checking (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Padgett, 1998), whereby the participants of the research are asked to check the researcher's interpretations of their stories. I decided against this, because member checking presented the problems of locating the participants after the interview and trusting their judgement. In order to protect my participants' identities, I did not record any information, such as a telephone number that would have enabled me to locate them. Those who I could have located through the Establishment I felt would be concerned with me presenting a positive portrayal of them, and if my findings conflicted with how they wanted to present themselves, they would not agree with my interpretation. I felt this would be particularly problematic in that I did not accept at face value their belief in Joseph Kony as a spirit medium, or as a messiah. As such, I did not feel that member checking would be a reliable way to verify the accuracy of my observations and interpretations.

Likewise, negative case analysis – when a case does not fit with the main findings – is a means of establishing the credibility of qualitative research (Patton, 1990), but when something diverged significantly from every other interview, this

was a very real cause for concern, as to whether the participant was being truthful or not, so unless I could verify the information through outside sources, I did not include it as a negative case. While it is important to honour the voices of participants, I felt it was also important that I present information that was not untrue or embellished, in order to ensure the credibility of my research. Given that I had been specifically warned by my key contacts that people might lie about their involvement in the LRA, this was a genuine concern and so I erred on the side of caution when it came to divergent accounts.

## **7.10. Researcher Bias**

It is important to acknowledge the researcher's role in qualitative research, because the researcher is the primary instrument of both data collection and data analysis. As such, researchers must be reflexive, meaning that they should be critically self-aware of their personal biases and viewpoints on the phenomenon of study. Reflexivity is an important way to promote rigour in the research process (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004, p.275), and requires "critical reflection on how the researcher constructs knowledge from the research process" (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004, p.275). Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I kept a reflexive journal to record and monitor my own reactions to the research and to acknowledge my influence on the research.

Being reflexive was particularly important as I was conducting research in a foreign country, which could lead to a potential lack of understanding of the norms or values of the culture (Mandel, 2003). I am an outsider, not just of the group I was studying, but also to their community and country. Concerns have been raised that an outsider cannot understand the experiences of a community or group of which they are not a member (Bridges, 2001). It is important to be able to understand the setting to accurately represent the participant – the insider's – perspective (Bartunek and Louis, 1996), and not impose one's own assumption on how they frame their understanding (Bridges, 2001). Along with monitoring my own assumptions and reactions, I did my best to assimilate into the culture as I was living in Gulu while I did the research, by trying to learn some of

the local language, Lwo, although somewhat unsuccessfully. Not being from the same country or background as my participants did have the advantage in that I had no shared experiences with my participants, which made it easier for me to be an outsider, needing to learn.

More damaging, there are concerns that outsiders can exploit the community or group that they are researching (Bridges, 2001). Research relationships should be reciprocal (Cotterill, 1992). A solution to this is to look for ways to counter this imbalance, so it is not one sided, but I was not really in any position to offer anything in way of return. Friends in Kampala also suggested that the gender dynamics meant that it might have been inappropriate to reciprocate. The lack of reciprocity concerned me more with regard to my key contacts who had put time and effort into locating people for me to talk to, and permitting me access, and became problematic when they wanted me to stay in Gulu when my research ended, and continued to call me after I had left, wanting to know when I would go back. I felt the best way to handle this was to be honest with them that I did not plan to return. It was difficult to negotiate, as I did not want them to feel used, but at the same time the financial and time pressures of doing a PhD thesis, combined with my desire not to contract Crimean-Congo Haemorrhagic Fever, meant that returning to Gulu was not feasible.

Being a woman in a research project that relied predominantly on men – the gatekeepers and key contacts were all men, as were the people I interacted with at the Establishment – was both a help and a hindrance. Women do have an advantage in that they are seen as less threatening than men, although they face the disadvantage of being viewed as less professional or able than men (Gurney, 1991). I did find that men were very friendly and cooperative, and I sought to mitigate the disadvantages by always dressing professionally and carrying with me the letter of affiliation from MISR. Being female helped with the interviews with women, although it was the two women who had usurped the traditional gender roles with whom I had the most rapport and had the most interesting interviews. Despite these limitations and concerns, in-person interviews were the best method to conduct this research, given the reality of doing research on a hidden population in a foreign country.

The findings from the data fall into three main themes: violence, the spirits and allegiance. I discuss each of the three themes next, including the subthemes that emerged within each theme. Each subtheme has been titled from phrases that captured the essence of the subtheme in the interviews. The themes are presented in an order that gives a flow to the experience of abduction and advancement, starting with violence, then the spirits and finally allegiance. I then discuss the importance of the themes and how they explain why forced recruits stay and advance within the LRA. I also discuss the implications for policy and further research.



## 8. Violence

“I wish the LRA had got you” former LRA commander Samuel told me one morning, “you walk fast.” I was flattered, naturally, although this is not one of the documented characteristics considered desirable by the LRA when it comes to recruitment. But the comment did reveal that they valued efficiency. Like any other organisation, the LRA rely on efficiency to function effectively, and require recruits to act in a manner that advances productivity. They do not just need cowed fighting machines; recruits do in fact have to contribute to the successful operation of the group. Of course, this seems at odds with a group that relies upon forced recruitment, where recruitment is based upon nothing more than the availability of a person to be abducted. The abductors are not able to choose recruits who will make good fighters, or be loyal to the group, or be committed to the rebellion, and yet that is exactly what they require from the people they abduct. In an attempt to explain how the LRA turns an abductee into a rebel, prior research covers at length the initiation rituals used to break down psychological defences and cut the abductees off from their community through a traumatic process that involves the excessive use of irrational and unpredictable violence (Amone-P’Olak, 2007; Baines, 2009; Russell and Gozdzia, 2006; Talwar, 2004; Van Acker, 2004).

I found that violence is indeed an integral means of internal control for forced recruits. But violence is not indiscriminate or random; violence is in fact very strategic. Violence is used as a form of recruitment selection after abduction, whereby only the fittest would survive, and the weak, or anyone who tried to escape would die. Violence is also used as punishment for those who transgress the rules of the LRA, and serves as a deterrent to others. But violence does not have to be used to effectively motivate recruits – the threat of violence alone proves to be enough. The threat of violence is used at the time of abduction to prevent escape attempts, and the threat of violence from their

community also acts as a push factor in the decision not to leave. Contrarily, the decision to leave comes when the recruit ceases to be afraid to die, and so the power of the threat of being killed is no longer effective.

My participants invariably came to commit acts of violence themselves, some out of necessity to ensure their own survival, but some actually came to find meaning in the violence and the fighting in which they participated. Recruits also became victims of violence, and the women, and perhaps surprisingly, the top commanders suffered the most. Women are subject to sexual violence, in the form of forced marriages, and to non-sexual physical violence if they resist rape within these 'marriages'. The top commanders are victims of violence too. This happens when leader Joseph Kony perceives them as a threat to his authority. The top commanders are the only ones to be victims of violence that seems irrational and unpredictable

Equally important as the use of violence to bind the recruits to the groups is the use of nonviolence. Participants who had both been abducted and become abductors report a lack of violence in abduction, and instead report being treated well and treating others well. Recruits who make it through the selection process are taken care of if they become ill or injured, demonstrating the importance of recruits as members of the LRA. Commanders report taking care of people under their charge, and also taking care of one another. They work as a cohesive unit, collectively looking out for the well-being of each other. LRA leader Joseph Kony is also repeatedly mentioned as being nonviolent, and not condoning the violence in which his commanders engage. The top commanders I spoke to, nevertheless, all deny that they had ever engaged in violent acts, but did report the beatings that they had received on Kony's orders.

## **8.1. “There's this thing of survival for the fittest”: Strategic Violence**

Several studies have examined how the LRA use violence in their initiation of recruits (e.g. Blattman and Annan, 2010a; Baines, 2009). Prior research has

found, for example, that abducted people are forced to commit atrocities against their family or community in order to 'burn bridges' (Amone-P'Olak, 2007). Several reports state that the LRA forces abductees to kill other children soon after their abduction, being told 'kill or be killed' (Baines, 2009; Van Acker, 2004). Research demonstrates that the vast majority of abductees have witnessed atrocities, and many – although the numbers between studies vary – admit to having committed atrocities, such as murder (Derulyn et al., 2004; Talwar, 2004). This is consistent with research on other rebel groups, such as the RUF in Sierra Leone (Denov, 2010)

I found that the violence experienced at recruitment was not a form of initiation, but rather a means for the LRA to 'weed out' people who are not going to make productive or efficient members of the group. Recruitment occurs in two stages. Firstly, the LRA abduct people who are young, and then they eliminate those that will not make good soldiers. Violence is not used against those considered desirable recruits, only to eliminate those who are not.

### **8.1.1. *Desirable Recruits***

Desirable recruits for the LRA – as with other groups that rely on forced recruitment – are young boys. George, himself fourteen when he was abducted, told me that twelve to fifteen year olds were the ideal recruits. Similar reports appear extensively in the literature, and a variety of reasons have been put forward to explain this: it takes less effort to abduct children than adults (Beber and Blattman, 2010); children are more easily indoctrinated (Blattman and Annan, 2010a); children are more expendable than adult recruits (Russell and Gozdzia, 2006); and Uganda has a disproportionately young population, and so children are more available to be abducted (Twum-Danso. 2003). Three of my participants, all of whom were mid-ranking commanders, explain the reasons young boys are considered desirable recruits. George accredited it to the fact they are braver and prouder than older recruits:

George: It is very easy to mobilise young ones, because they are strong hearted, and the big ones are always fearful, they get tired very fast. And the young ones are always very proud,

when they kill a large number of UPDF, and they have brought guns, they always celebrate it.

Grace, a former lieutenant, said that young recruits were good fighters and did not think twice about killing:

Grace: It is like, these young boys, they are more sharp than any human being, that's why you could hear in the radio that Kony has young people and they can fight very well. This is because the young people, the infants, they can fight without feeling the pain, they cannot see the pain in them, why have you killed, who have killed, what is the purpose? They don't feel anything of the kind. Their work is just to only feel, seeing anybody, just to kill. That is what Joseph Kony needs, and they do the best, to give respect to Joseph Kony. So that is why you could see most of the young boys...they are best fighters than some of us, who are mature people.

Richard, however, acknowledged the indoctrination process:

Richard: You know the problem was, they like, they abduct young people. They don't abduct old people. Like at our ages, when they get you now, they can just kill you. So they like young people. Now because young people, it is very easy to indoctrinate in their brain. You can play with their brain very fast, and they can what, they can become so loyal to you, as long as you put fears in their – that's why they liked young people. They can even abduct very young, very, even these babies, even sometimes they take them away, because now they begin growing there. Now the doctrine in their mind, that you should kill, you should do what, the child grows up there knowing that the right thing to do is to kill, to do war, to rape, too... Yeah, those are the things.

George and Grace both explain that young people are desirable recruits because they possess the characteristics that make a good soldier: they are strong hearted, which meant having courage, they are good fighters, and they kill easily. George points out that older people are more fearful, which is not an advantageous quality for a rebel. Richard – who had been abducted at the age of nine, which is younger than the 'ideal' recruitment age – says that young people are easier to indoctrinate, which is what prior research has contended (for example, see Blattman and Annan, 2010a). Perhaps proving his point that young recruits are more likely to become loyal, Richard defended the use of abduction as a means of recruitment, telling me: "Now I was abducted, because they were

told to abduct. They did not abduct me on their own, they needed soldiers, so how could you recruit soldiers?"

### **8.1.2. Recruit Selection**

Once people have been abducted, the LRA kills abductees who do not become loyal, in order to eliminate the 'wrong' kind of recruits post recruitment. With voluntary recruitment, the leaders are able to select competent and trustworthy members before they are allowed to join the group, but in the LRA, recruitment selection occurs after abduction. Richard relates that recruits who were fearful were not considered suitable soldiers and so would get shot by their own side:

Richard: Yes, sometimes they are killed, in most cases, because now if people are going for a serious fights and you tend to be fearful, you can be shot down, because you are now letting people down. Instead of going to fight seriously, so we can achieve a mission, if you what, you are fearing to fight, which means we are not going to achieve, we are not going to get food, we are not going to – so instead you are like against us. In some serious cases, they have to kill that person. You can be shot in the battlefield immediately, there.

Interviewer: So the LRA will kill their own soldiers if they were not helping?

Richard: Yeah, they kill. They kill. Because now you become useless, if you are not helping, a commander can decide to shoot you. If it is a continuous case that you very always fearful, they seat people down, then they take you, and they kill you. So that is how they used to deal with fearful people.

This is because fear is detrimental to the success of the group in battle, and thus the fearful person is harming the wellbeing of the entire group. An army cannot afford to have recruits let them down in battle. Similarly, cowardice is a serious offence under military law, and according to the *Uganda Peoples' Defence Force Act* of 1992, it is punishable by death or life imprisonment (Chapter 307, Section 29(1)) for soldiers of the Ugandan army. The refusal to follow orders in the LRA also results in the death of the disobedient recruit:

William: Because he [Kony] was the boss. So, for him, if he say something, if you refuse, if you do it another way, you are

the one going to suffer. Because if he tells you that today, we go this way, and you refuse, you follow another direction, you are going to meet the UPDF then they fight you. Then if he say, today, we have not, we go and sleep somewhere here, you have to follow that instruction, what he say. For him, he's, I don't know. People say he's a witchdoctor, but he can just become [inaudible]...he can say you walk for fifty miles, and you will walk. If you are in Gulu here, he can say, today we are going to reach southern Sudan. If you refuse, if you say, for us, we are not going, they will kill you.

Roger put it more succinctly:

Roger: If you refused, you would be killed.

William's and Roger's comments illustrate that obedience is an essential characteristic for recruits. Like a regular army, a soldier must obey the orders of his or her commanding officer. An army requires soldiers to follow the chain of command in order to operate efficiently. Insubordination is an offence under conventional military law, and an offender could expect to be court martialled and punished. In an army of forced recruits, someone who refuses to follow orders is expendable.

### **8.1.3. *Survival of the Fittest***

Recruits do not just need to be obedient and fearless in order to remain alive. They also have to survive the harsh realities of rebel warfare, which include acquiring food, get weapons, surviving battle, and carrying items for long distances. Those who best adapt survive, and those who cannot die or are killed. They simply do not live through the experience. The LRA requires each recruit to adapt and find a way to survive. Recruitment is a process of natural selection.

Richard explained it best:

Richard: There's this thing of survival for the fittest, sometimes you have to go and raid people's food, you go and attack soldiers, so you can get some foodstuff from them. So it wasn't easy, because all our lives was entirely – you either go and kill someone, or you are killed in the process.

Colin likewise told me that each recruit has to be concerned with staying alive, and that recruits can rely on no one but themselves to get through it:

Colin: First of all, you should like your life, and you should be a survivor. You should be very quick and sharp, in order to really to keep control of your dear life. If not, you will not be there. For example, if his leg falls down here, we shall all run here quickly, and you will take care of your own life, I shall also do mine, he shall also do his.

Recruits often die because they cannot endure the gruelling conditions involved in guerrilla warfare, such as lack of food, or having to walk long distances while carrying heavy burdens. Miriam discussed her own experience of the challenges that came with the training:

Miriam: Yes, I underwent training, that really was serious. And many people died, because by then we had food shortage, especially now the young people, who could not really push lives, hunger, they died. And in the course of the training, we could carry luggage on our backs, and they could also take us to shoot bulls, for target. So it was a full training anyway.

The move to southern Sudan was also strenuous, according to Thomas:

Thomas: And very many people were arrested by then, and they gave us some heavy luggages, heavy loads, to carry and take it. And others died on the way going to southern Sudan because they could not now continue with moving, walking. Others were killed. If you cannot walk a distance, they just kill you.

Entering into battle, Richard related that new recruits are not provided with guns, which means they go into battle unarmed, and have to acquire a gun in the midst of fighting. It takes bravery and a lot of initiative to get a gun and survive, meaning that only recruits with those characteristics make it out alive and become full-fledged members of the LRA:

Richard: So, in order for you to acquire guns, you wait until someone is killed, or a soldier, you go and attack a soldier and you kill so that you pick the gun, and now you begin using it. There is nowhere you can be given a gun, distributed a gun, no, you have to look the for a gun. And if you lose that gun in the fight, it is definitely – Your life will go. They will kill you.

Interviewer: So you were sent into battle without having a gun? You had to...

Richard: Yeah, to manoeuvre my ways of getting a gun. That one means you have to kill someone and get a gun.

Interviewer: How do you kill someone if you don't have a gun?

Richard: Of course in a fight people will die in the battlefield so as you are going for the search and rescue... You know when we attacked the barracks, we left many dead, and that's how I got the guns.

The LRA exposes recruits to dangerous situations to see who lives through it, and exterminates those who were not strong, loyal or obedient. Through these initiation processes, the LRA strategically uses violence to effectively select desirable recruits from amongst the people that the group have abducted.

#### **8.1.4. Punishment**

The LRA also uses violence strategically to punish specific transgressions. Like any other army or legal organisation, the LRA has rules of conduct to be followed by all members. Noncompliance is detrimental to the rebel group, and so enforcement of rules is tantamount. Punishment is physical and violent in nature, in the form of caning or execution. The severity of punishment, such as the number of strokes of the cane, is determined on the basis of the offence. Colin related being beaten and demoted for choosing a woman abductee to be his 'forced wife' and raping her, even though she had not been 'given' to him:

Colin: From brigade commander I was transferred to battalion RCM [regimental corporal major], which means I was, my rank was taken down again, because from commander to RCM. This was because I had known women already, and so that's what brought me problems. Maybe the woman saw me as a handsome man, and as well beautiful lady, so I had to really have the woman, but the bosses were not really happy with me. That girl was very young, and I took her from [*place*]. I was just keeping her for Otti-Lagony [Kony's second in commander] ...and I was beaten two hundred and fifty.

Visual and savage punishment, such as caning, is designed to be exemplary, and act as a deterrent to others (Beccaria, [1764] 1992). Physical



punishment also allows the punisher to assert its authority over the body of the transgressor (Foucault, [1975] 1995; Spierenburg, 1984). Physical punishment may appear to be the only manner of sanction available to a rebel group that otherwise would not have the resources to inflict any other manner of punishment, but Arthur, a former top commander, in fact told me that he had been imprisoned by Kony for several months. The LRA apparently has the facilities to incarcerate people. I understood the reason for Arthur being imprisoned rather than beaten was because he was a high-ranking commander, and it was probably therefore not in Kony's interest to shame someone that close to him, nor to demonstrate to the rest of the group the discord in the high command.

Richard explained to me the importance of the rules, in ensuring harmony among members of the LRA, as well as another means of punishment used by the LRA:

Richard: Of course the rules that there you cannot, you should not stand against your colleague, like you begin fighting your colleague, you kill, and the rest of it, no. You should not do it. Unless he has done something wrong, and then you report to your immediate boss, this person has done this. Then if they find him guilty, they punish him.

Interviewer: How do they punish him?

Richard: It varies. Sometimes they cane, or is sometimes they remove the gun, then they send him to the battlefield, without a gun, so you have to look for the gun. It's a mild way of maybe saying you go and die. So sometimes, they also escape still, and come back with their gun. I told you process of getting the guns is not easy. So if they come back like that and punishment is over.

Here, the transgressor must use his or her initiative to come out of the punishment alive. Rather like the recruitment selection, where they are not given guns and must acquire one for themselves in battle, the person being punished must prove that he or she are still a worthwhile member to the group, despite having broken the rules, and they demonstrate this through finding a way to get through a battle alive.

The punishment for those who try to desert from the LRA was an offence punishable by death, much like it is under Ugandan military law (Uganda Peoples'

Defence Force Act of 1992, Chapter 307, Section 29). I asked Andrew what would happen to people who would try and escape. He said “obviously you would be killed.”<sup>14</sup> Likewise, Richard and William confirmed this:

Richard: If they get you when you deserting, they find that one is a death case. They kill you.

William: So, if they, if you try to escape, they kill you, there and then.

Killing those who attempt to escape not only serves to eliminate bad recruits and deter others, but it also has a more practical purpose. Recruits who successfully escape can report information about the group to the enemy, which damages the group far more than losing recruits, because it gives the enemy a tactical advantage:

Alfred: They ask me that, why did I want to, what, to escape. So for me, I refused that for me, I not wanted to escape, only that I just got lost, I was also looking after them. That was my statement to them. But they beat me, they told me that it is us, it is we people who what, who always escape from there, we just come back home, we get UPDF, we what, we tell them their what, their secrets, so they don't want those kind of people. Once maybe, if we have been caught, we should be killed.

However, some members do successfully desert, then rejoin the LRA, and survive. Two of my participants went back to the LRA, and were not killed. Roger, a lieutenant, had successfully escaped, got amnesty, gone through a reception centre, and returned to his community, from where he was promptly re-abducted:

Roger: I was again arrested by the commander, and was taken back....I was taken direct to Joseph Kony, to find out how I escaped.

Interviewer: and what happened?

Roger: I was punished, and they caned me, 150 canes, they gave me, they beat me 150 times, and another policeman was, I was given a detention for five months, that I could not even go anywhere, stay in the impound, stay in the detention house.

<sup>14</sup> The interview was not recorded at the participant's request.

Small run I stay there for five months....that, anyway the reason why I was not killed after my second, actually after my re-abduction, because when I went to give the statement on how, why I escaped when I was taken to Joseph Kony I told him that I was, for me, I never decided to escape voluntarily, but during a serious battle, and I was defeated, and I surrendered to the UPDF.

Like Roger, Colin successfully escaped after his commanding office, Otti-Lagony was executed by Kony, and he feared a similar fate. However, life out of the LRA was not all he had hoped it would be, and after spending a year incarcerated in Luzira Maximum Security Prison, for an unspecified offence, he decided to rejoin the LRA, although he gave far more noble reasons for returning in his explanation to me:

Colin: No one has ever escaped from Kony, gone back to Kony, and shaken his hand. Many people died, many died, but they tried. But I'm still alive....I would have been a hero, but because of the worldly behaviour, I wouldn't have been like this...It was out of my own initiative that I ended my life. I want to stop this, the suffering of the Acholi people. So if Kony is going to kill me, let him kill me. I even don't know why he didn't kill me. Because even my parents told me I should never risk going back, but I went and I was not killed, so I don't know. I am very aware, and I know that nobody had gone back and support. If you escape and you go back again, he kills.

Roger had lied and claimed he had been forced to surrender to the Uganda army after defeat. He was punished, but not killed. Colin, on the other hand, left voluntarily and went back voluntarily. He eventually became a top commander. These two were not killed because they were not expendable. New recruits are expendable. Mid-ranking and high ranking commanders, on the other hand, have demonstrated their loyalty and commitment to the group, their capability to survive, to gain rank and to effectively manage lower ranking soldiers, and therefore are not as easily replaceable. Roger's claim that he had not willingly left, and Colin's decision to go back demonstrated some commitment to the group, in the eyes of Kony.

The LRA uses violence selectively, to select recruits and punish any behaviour that would harm the group. Excessive violence is not used because it

would not be an effective way to motivate recruits to comply. The LRA is not seeking to cow its recruits into submission to do whatever they are told to do. Rather, the LRA wants people who will use their initiative, people who are resourceful, in short people who will make good rebels. Excessive or indiscriminate violence, on the other hand, creates a climate of fear. The systematic use of terror and irrational punishment should create conditions of learned helplessness, whereby the victim becomes passive, knowing that they have no control over events (Hiroto and Seligman, 1975). It would not be productive for a rebel group to be made up of people who are submissive and incapable to fight.

## **8.2. “When you escape, you are beaten, or you are killed. Is there anybody going to escape?”: Threat of Violence**

When violence is used selectively, it is only applied to recruits who are undermining the group (Weinstein, 2006) and serves to demonstrate that conformity will spare them from violence. Often, a display of violence is not necessary to ensure the compliance of recruits – just the threat of violence was enough. Likewise, Biderman (1975) found in a study of prisoners of war that the fear of violence alone was a significant motivator for compliance. Gates (2011) argues that the threat of violence is an important aspect of gaining cooperation in groups that forcefully recruit.

### **8.2.1. *Abduction***

While prior research on the LRA and other rebel groups emphasises the role of violence in abduction (Amone-P’Olak, 2007; Baines, 2009; Denov, 2010; Van Acker, 2004), it is in fact the threat of violence at the time of abduction that appears to be an important control mechanism to prevent the new recruits from trying to escape. In the accounts of their abductions, Roger and George, both of whom were teenagers at the time, related the threat rather than the use of violence:

Roger: It was very early in the morning around 6 AM as we prepared to take our corn [to market], to take, actually to go to school, the rebels came. And after that we all were put into gunpoint, and we were abducted.

Roger said he was abducted at gunpoint, while George was tied up and threatened with death – neither reported being physically harmed during their abduction:

George: I was abducted in late evening when I was home, because we were young. They tied us using ropes, and they told us, if any of us are to escape, we will be killed.

This affirms what other participants told me about ‘young ones’ being better recruits because they are far more easily mobilised. Further, the fear of violence is effective to motivate them to behave, and not to try to escape immediately after abduction – an actual display of violence is not necessary to get them to comply, and may have been detrimental.

### **8.2.2. *Top Commanders: Threat Against Family***

All of my participants claimed that they had been abducted. No one admitted to having joined voluntarily. But six of my participants had been with the LRA since the 1980s – five of the top commanders, and one woman who had been a medic to Kony<sup>15</sup>. They all had been adults when they joined, and all said they had not done so willingly. I had no way of verifying whether this was true or not. Previous research has stated that abduction became the sole means of recruitment in 1994 (Blattman and Annan, 2008; Lomo and Hovil, 2004), and according to former top commander Arthur<sup>16</sup>, this was correct. He said that there were two means of recruitment: conscription and voluntary. The LRA changed to conscription to swell the numbers, because not many people were joining voluntarily, but he said that they were “not much worried” about spies infiltrating them through voluntary recruitment. Nevertheless, it is not implausible that the

<sup>15</sup> The sixth top commander I interviewed, Colin, had been abducted as a child, and risen through the ranks. This is addressed in the chapter on allegiance.

<sup>16</sup> The interview was not recorded at his request.

LRA may have used coercion to get recruits prior to 1994, but it is also likely that no one, especially those suspected of having committed atrocities, would want to admit to having joined voluntarily. On the other hand, their five stories are all very similar, suggesting that this could have been the mode of recruitment prior to the LRA's change of tactics in 1994.

Either way, the stories of the five top commanders' abduction differed substantially from the other participants. While most of the lower ranking recruits reported threats of violence against themselves when they were abducted, the top commanders all reported threats against their family rather than themselves when they were abducted.

Arthur said he had to fight, and said that he did not try to escape because the LRA would kill his family and people from his neighbourhood, "to make people survive, it was good to endure the problems. He said that he "did not want his family to suffer", so he had to suffer, and sacrifice for their existence. Edward, who admitted he had been in the national army, the UNLA, under Obote, told me he had still not chosen to join the rebels:

Edward: But when I was still talking to my family, my wife and children, my mother and brother, we saw some line of soldiers coming, and they were in the same uniform, so I thought ah, this is the government... this was not government, it was LRA now. When they drew near, I saw them, I knew some of them. This one is different... So I saw, all of them I know. We were in the UNLA together. They said, they came three lines. They said, I said what is the matter? They said, we have come for you. I said, to do what? Said, ah, ah, we are now fighting, you cannot stay at home. Then I said, no, I am tired of fighting. You give me time first, before I come to join you. They said, no today. I said, no, I'm tired. Said, if you don't want, we either leave you dead, or tomorrow, we collect you with your wife and your children. And I thought they were still joking because I knew them. And to show they were serious, they started shooting guns, even shooting my goat. Shooting chicken. Then I knew things were not. So my wife started crying, my mother started crying and brothers, then I told them, you don't know me, I am a soldier, my wife and children, I know I am [inaudible] then I told them, leave my family if you want me to go. Ok, if you want to go, your family will not.

James, who was in his mid-thirties when he joined, claimed his parents did not want him to come back because of the threat against them.

James: So they asked my parents, that we are going with you, with the children, you stay home here, he will work with us the rest of his life. So, if he comes back, we will come and kill all of you. Being so fearful to them, I accepted, they used rope to tie our waists, and I decided to go with them. Even my parents told me I should go and work with them, I should not come back, fearing that they may come and kill the whole clan... So that brought me fear, and I could not escape. This made me to stay with the LRA, for long period of time. And because of that, I was given a gun, and the gun I was given, I used it for killing as well.

Charles' account of being forced to join the LRA is very similar, where he recalled that it was his family that was threatened. He also related that this threat was carried out against other forced recruits:

Charles: He started talking to us, that I'm going to make you come my soldiers. If you try to escape, we are going to destroy all your family. Those are the instructions given to us. So some of us tried, and they were killed on the way. Some of us tried, but their families were killed. So I became afraid of escaping.

Samuel, likewise, attributed his decision not to try to escape to the threats made against his family.

Samuel: For the life of my family, for the life of my clan, for the life of my tribe, I did not escape, at that time. That's how people, many people who have that idea, that I had better suffer...[to] save my people. Many people are like that. But they had the idea of coming back home. But they want to save the life of their people, they're not going to make that mistake.

Either the top commanders are lying in order to present themselves as noble and self-sacrificial, or they are telling the truth and the LRA simply used different means of coercing them into staying. If the top commanders are lying, and claiming that they stayed with the LRA in to protect their families, these false accounts could serve to demonstrate that they are taking care of their own people, and thus defends them against accusations that they have committed atrocities against their own people: on the contrary, they stayed with the group in

order to protect their own people. On the other hand, all five of the top commanders were adults when they were 'abducted', and threats against family may be a more effective incentive for them to stay than threats against themselves, unlike teenage abductees, who are motivated by threats against their own lives rather than those of others. Furthermore, adults have a greater ability to execute an escape (Beber and Blattman, 2010), and so threats against their family is a stronger deterrent, because the threat can still be carried out even in the event of a successful escape.

### **8.2.3. *Desertion***

Desertion is punished by death, and an effective threat to persuade people to remain in a somewhat undesirable situation. Michael, a second lieutenant, told me that life with the LRA was not easy, but the fear of death persuaded him not to try and escape:

Michael: Staying in the bush with LRA is full of difficulties only, you will never get an easy life there. First of all, I never wanted even to escape, because I thought they would kill me. As I could see sometimes, whoever tries to escape, they kill.

Michael did not even want to escape because of the threats, while George told me that he wanted to escape, but was too afraid to do so.

George: And I was also having fear, because I thought, if I am to escape they may arrest me and kill me. Those who tried to escape, they arrest and kill.

Esther reported what happened if someone was caught trying to escape.

Esther: And now, when I wanted to escape, whenever you wanted to escape, if they caught you, they would cut you. They will just cut you. Killing you, they could just put you in that tree like this, they just shoot you. Although your brothers, although your what, they can just give you kill, if they not they will turn up on you.

George and Esther both also related that they wanted to escape, but were too afraid to do so. The threat of violence alone is enough to retain recruits. Forced



recruits in Sierra Leone's RUF also reported that they stayed because they feared the punishment if they tried to desert (Maclure and Denov, 2006). Within the RUF, escapees were shot, or some were reportedly thrown down a well and drowned (Denov and Gervais, 2007). Prior research on the LRA has stated that recruits would be forced to kill those that tried to escape with clubs (HRW, 1997).

#### **8.2.4. Propaganda**

The threat of violence is not limited to violence that the LRA would inflict on a member who tried to escape. The participants also feared violence at the hands of their communities should they return home, because those very communities were terrorised by the LRA, and they would get the blame. The Ugandan government had tried to mitigate this fear after the passage of the amnesty, and, to encourage people to come out, they broadcasted the stories of returnees over a local radio station, Radio Mega in Gulu, as well as dropped pictures of former rebels, alive and well, into the bush where the current rebels were hiding. But this did little to alienate the fear that people had – not without reason. Former rebels often are reported to have had a lot of problems when they return, because of the stigma of having been part of the LRA (Akello, Ritchers and Reis, 2006; Corbin, 2008). Susan, who had not wanted to leave, but ended up being captured after she had accompanied one of Kony's pregnant forced 'wives' to hospital in Sudan, told me why she had not wanted to leave the LRA:

Susan: It was just the natural fear that leaving LRA, coming out, that is death. Because you will be killed for something you not know. That's why we felt no one should really leave, and that's why other people are still there even up to now. Because of that fear.... And even those ones, the soldiers themselves, the Ugandan soldiers, sometimes they would come, if they meet you, they will kill you. They have no excuse. Therefore you cannot think, ah let me go out and I really go and join civilians, because I also fear to myself to be killed...There are so many people who are fearing to come out, that they are going to be killed.

Other participants talked about similar fears:

Interviewer: So before you had heard your friend over Radio Mega, did you not think about coming home?

Alfred: I had no interest of coming back home before I heard.

Interviewer: Why?

Alfred: Because I thought maybe when I come back they can just kill me, what, this one has been in the bush and he's the one who has been what, killing our people, what. I was fearing.

Alfred feared the reaction of his community, and Esther expressed similar concerns.

Esther: Even for me, I was having a fear, because they used to tell us, if you come home, they will just kill you.

George noted that the physical appearance of LRA members set them apart, and this caused him to be afraid, even though he had not wanted to join.

George: I was abducted, I had not gone willingly. So I got there forcefully. So they did not disturb me. Only that I had fear, because, by then, we were – we had dreadlocks, and a uniform was different from theirs. So I could fear, because I may think they could kill me. So that made me to have that fear.

Kony effectively manipulates the fear of being killed by their community should a member successfully escape. This is especially important in order to retain recruits after the amnesty gave people the option to leave the bush without fear of prosecution.

Samuel: He [Kony] was telling people that Amnesty is not true, if you get out, you will stay to some days, but you will be killed. Even a person goes to the radio and talks, that I am alive, he will say that, that is a pre-used voice...a recorded voice. Don't listen to him, that one is dead now. Even for me, I have been talking but they tell that I'm killed. So the remaining people got confused, and up to now, what is happening, because I have taken my picture, I think you saw it, I took my photo with my children and drop it to them, that I am alive, don't let anybody deceive you, see my children, they are at school, come and take your children also to school, and they start realising, that I am alive, we are all alive. That gives them the idea of coming back home.

The participants all report their fear and ambivalence about leaving the LRA, because of uncertainty as to the reception that they will receive. The *Amnesty* was not enough to encourage them to come home, because it was the reaction of the community they feared more than the official sanctions they might have been subject to. The challenges of returning home after having been part of a rebel militia are a phenomenon familiar in other conflicts. In Mozambique, former child soldiers reported the stigma they faced when they returned from the bush (Boothby et al., 2006). This was especially true for girls in Sierra Leone, as they were viewed as 'spoiled', as a result of the sexual assaults many of them had endured (McKay, 2004).

### **8.2.5. No Fear**

The fear of violence from both the LRA and the community are powerful incentives for people to stay with the LRA. The decision to leave, then, for some comes when death no longer scares them, and the threat of dying ceases to have any power. Apathy towards death was noted in soldiers who fought in World War II, where the prolonged exposure to the poor living standards, bad diet and long stretches of boredom and loneliness left them indifferent to their survival (Greenon, 1949). Similarly, prisoners of war during both World War II and the Korean war are reported to have 'given up' trying to stay alive in response to the severe stress they experienced as a result of their confinement (Strassman, Thaler and Schein, 1956; White, 1957). But the former rebels were not apathetic, rather, they recognised that the threat of death existed where ever they were, and they would rather die at home than with the LRA. Their lack of fear of death actually motivated action, rather than provoking indifference:

Colin: From then, I sat, I started thinking, at least God, then my almighty God will bless me, if only fearing death, here there is death there is death wherever I go, surely I should die in a strange land, or in my own land. So I thought, no, I have got to go home, and die in my own land.

Colin felt that he faced death regardless, and he'd rather die in Uganda. Esther had reported to me that she stayed for fear of being killed if she tried to escape, but, like Colin, she decided she would rather die in Uganda.

Esther: Even for me, I was having a fear, because they used to tell us, if you come home, they will just kill you. Then I came, I met a certain mzee, I said, let me just try now by my luck, I'd rather die in our place now here, in Uganda here.

Grace described the moment of realisation that death was unavoidable whether she stayed or left.

Grace: It was one day, one time, when we were travelling with RV [reconnaissance vehicle]. That is, Joseph Kony also there, so we are going for a meeting, and we headed into the ambush. I was also in the sick bay. And in that ambush, two of my escorts were killed, and the kid, the child that I was carrying survived, but was not shot anywhere. So people were scattered, I felt that I could not do anything, so I decided to pick my gun, I picked that child, and I entered into the bush and started walking slowly, slowly, looking for where any barrack is, so I could go and join. In the course of walking, I just get my life, say, eh, if God want to kill me, I die. It is just between death and life.

Like Grace, it was during battle that Miriam came to feel that should would die if she stayed, and might also die if she left, and given this stark reality, she would rather leave.

Miriam: So when we were walking, they started firing at us, around 100km away, they started firing. And my child was being carried by some girl, the splinter of the bomb came and removed her head, and just like that, and the girl that was carrying, really pick all over, the body parts, and she died. So it came to my mind that I should see a way to leave. When I saw that boy was killed, [inaudible] because I was also pregnant and I was also carrying another child. So when I saw that, because the kid was already three years old, so when I see that [inaudible] and even the UPDF were still firing at us. So we threw the child. What came to my mind was, what I saw and even what happened, if I stayed here, I will die. Even if I go to the government, they may still kill me, so death is now a very well on both sides. If a young kid of three years, who has not done anything to anyone in this world, can get killed and die, I would rather leave.

The threat of violence over an extended period of time, combined with the conditions the rebel group survived in, ceases to be a means of control, because the threat of death exists both in and out of the group. This has not been reported

in other rebel groups, where often demobilisation occurs because the conflict comes to an end.

### **8.3. “Hold a gun and you will just be free”: Committing Violence**

As is to be expected of a group involved in armed rebellion, the recruits invariably commit acts of violence. All participants took part in fighting at one time or another, especially during an ambush by the UPDF, and success in battle was a basis for promotion.

#### **8.3.1. *Violence for Survival***

Initially, many of my participants reported having to kill in order to survive. As they were exposed to battle situations, they had no option but to take the initiative to stay alive. Michael admitted killing others so that he would not be killed:

Michael: But in the fighting, I fought, I even killed many people, because I had to kill in order to survive...Because I am fighting to kill, you are also fighting to kill. So it means you can either kill me, or I kill them to survive. Any of us will kill the other just to survive.

Grace told me that she was not given guns, and so had to acquire them during battle.

Grace: In the fighting, this is when we secured guns, and you come back with yours, a number of guns you have got. If you have got three, you come back with three, if you have got one, you come back with that one. But we were not being supplied with guns...There was no way out, for any of us, without killing and shooting with guns.

But there were also things that recruits had to do off the battlefield:

Richard: You attack vehicles, you raid their money, whatever they have. So as to survive. You come to like where people live, you attack them, you loot their things, you do a lot of things so

that... A lot of mess actually, burned houses. There are certain things that you do under command, you cannot reject. You have to follow commands. So when you are told to go and do something, you'll do it. When you are told to go and burn a house, you have to do it, so that you can survive. When you are told to go and attack a vehicle on the way, you have to do it. So we were actually working under commands.

Richard reported other violent acts that members of the LRA had to participate in, to survive. As the LRA does not have civilian support, and has little recourse to acquire basic items such as food, the group resorts to plundering the civilian population. Both Grace and Richard used the second person to describe the violence they no doubt participated in, which suggests they were trying to distance themselves from what they had done. All three tried to justify the violence, saying that they had to do it, so that they could survive, or because, as Richard said, they were ordered to, and they could not disobey a commander. They did not want to take responsibility for these actions.

Another participant, who eventually reached the rank of lieutenant, reported, as a new recruit, having to kill another recruit who he heard was planning to shoot him in battle in order to steal his gumboots. Instead, Thomas killed him in battle first:

Thomas: So what I did, I looked for the person who wanted to really shoot me, and I shot him on the head, in order to make me secure. So I killed him, and the issue ended there. Because he wanted to kill me, for my own gumboots.

Life is cheap in the bush, and recruits have to be very careful to guard their lives through any means necessary, and that often means killing others.

### **8.3.2. *Finding Meaning in Violence***

Violence, in the form of fighting, is a basis on which rank is given within the LRA. Those who are good fighters, and do well in battle, get promoted. Promotion equates to power in the bush. Because of this some participants, all of whom were mid-ranking commanders at the time, came to find meaning in the violence they participated on in the battle field. Colin told me that when he first

joined, before he became a top commander, that having (and probably using) a gun gave him power:

Colin: Our life become very soft, so that you don't really mind. People could die of cholera, malaria, even of hunger, but we had no option, we have got to behave, and work, and work like soldiers. They normally tell us that if you have the gun, you just get anything to eat.

Thomas, a lieutenant, too reported that after he first joined, he was promoted from his battalion to the head quarter group, which is Control Alter where Kony is based, because he liked fighting:

Thomas: The commander decided to remove me from the group I was in, that is called Gilbert, under [Colonel Francis Oyat] Lapaicho. I was taken from the Gilbert group to headquarter group. They were told that, okay they were told that is Gilbert and headquarter. Headquarter is on the [inaudible], is commanded by Obock, and Gilbert, their commander is Lapaicho. In one months time, even my wounds got healed. Then after they, my wounds heal, then I decided, I made up my mind to go back to Gilbert group, that is Lapaicho. They accepted because in the headquarter group, they rarely send people to the battle, but for me, I was willing to go to the battle.

The ultimate goal of the rebellion, according to some recruits, is what motivated them to want to fight, and they found meaning in participating in the fighting.

George: The goal was to overthrow the government. But people were killing, which made it difficult, because people were being forced, they were abducted forcefully, and someone who is abducted forcefully will walk out of the bush without our notice, and we could these are number reducing, and sometimes some of them can escape with our guns. Their tactics are okay, but we are few. We do not have support. To be successful. But the main aim is to what, fight the government. But otherwise we enjoyed the fighting.

Interviewer: you liked the fighting?

George: Yes.

Grace reported that she believed that this fighting would lead to her own benefit.

Grace: they told us we are fighting to overthrow the government, and the benefit would be ours. So even me, when I was fighting that one day, onetime, we shall overthrow the government, and I shall benefit. So I was fighting for my own benefit

George admitted that besides wanting to overthrow the government, he liked fighting. The violence is not used merely to survive, but is done either for enjoyment or for some future aim. There is a purpose beyond merely living for the fighting, and they wish to achieve something through it, whether it be freedom and food, like Colin, or the overthrow of the government, like Grace, or for personal promotion, like Thomas. This suggests they found meaning in the acts they were committing. Baines (2009) suggests that violence becomes a political tool, whereby they gain resources that they are excluded from in society. Within the RUF in Sierra Leone, Maclure and Denov (2006) report that some of the abducted boys gained a sense of power from carrying out amputations, and that for some, violence came to take on more of a voluntary nature.

### **8.3.3. *Top Commanders: Violence Denied***

Within a traditional army hierarchy, the leaders or the top commanders are in charge of strategy and give the orders for attacks. This was the logic behind the International Criminal Court's decision to indict the top five commanders of the LRA for war crimes and crimes against humanity. They were the people who had ordered these atrocities, and they were therefore the most responsible for them (ICC Press Release, 14th October 2005; Schabas, 2007). Nevertheless, the top commanders I spoke to all categorically denied that they had been involved in any way in violence against the civilian population. They volunteered this information: I had not asked them any questions regarding their involvement in atrocities, for fear it would bring the interview to a swift conclusion, but they told me anyway. Edward, for example, told me that he simply was not present during the period when the LRA was actively massacring Ugandan civilians, and that he specifically had been sent away to the Sudanese capital, because he disapproved of the atrocities:



Edward: People went on mutilating, they thought that if I stayed I could bring real division. So they only way is to send me away. So they reassigned me, so I was taken to right in Khartoum, and during 1997, 98, when atrocity was too much here, I was already in Khartoum.

Arthur, who was living under protection because of the serious concerns for his safety were he to return home, told me he only fought the UPDF. He said "I did not want to stay. I got involved in battle, dealing with soldiers". He made it very clear that he was involved in the military only, and did not deal with civilians. Ironically, he was now relying on the very same UPDF to keep him safe. James told me that because of his rank, instead of being responsible for atrocities, he could in fact choose not to commit any.

James: If you are in the Bush with the rank of [his rank], you are always free, and you can do anything. So if you feel you should not do anything, you should not kill people, you should not do something bad, so that is what we were trying to do, and that's we were following....Our colleagues were hunting them and killing them, but I let them go free. So that one give me an easy life because I was not involved in massive killing, that is why you see me. Even government knew that I was not so involved in killing, that's why you see me here.

The common theme of these accounts is that these commanders each made a decision not to be involved in violence. Edward was reassigned, Arthur chose to only fight soldiers, and James chose not to be involved in killings. They did not deny that violence occurred, or that the LRA used violent means, they just denied their own involvement. While it is not particularly socially desirable to have committed gross human rights abuses, the lower ranking commanders seemed happy to admit to these. For the top commanders, who are most likely the ones responsible for ordering these atrocities, it was the fear of the International Criminal Court that appeared to be behind their firm denials. The ICC seemed to be hanging over the top commanders that I spoke to— even though when asked directly, they denied they feared it, as they had not done anything that warranted fear of international prosecution. Arthur refused to let me tape the interview because of his anxieties over the ICC, and without reference to himself, he said that the ICC indictments alone completely disturbed a number of

commanders. He stated that the commanders were not happy, and those already indicted did not know how it would be handled. While no one I talked to had been indicted by the ICC, and all had been granted amnesty, the ICC only indicts those who are most responsible for international crimes, which means the lower ranking commanders could not be prosecuted. On the other hand, the top commanders can be prosecuted, and indeed five have already been indicted, although two have subsequently died (ICC 2014; Schabas, 2007).

Off tape, James expressed a great deal of apprehension over the ICC, and it took both the proprietor of the Establishment and another former commander to convince him that I was not working for the ICC. On tape, however, he told me this:

James: I was not worried at all. I was not worried at all because my name was not among the top commanders, that the ICC wanted. There were also other commanders who were above me, and their names were not there, and they came back home, and they were not taken for that case. Then why should I fear? So, I just came home, and I joined. So I was not worried. There was nothing making me panic.

To admit on tape that they feared the ICC was, in their eyes, akin to admitting that had committed indictable offences, and so they simply denied it. Of course, if they were not afraid of the ICC, they may not have been any more likely to admit to violence, simply because it is not socially desirable or because they no longer wish to face up to the reality that they may have committed atrocities while in the LRA. None of them are soldiers any more, they are civilians, and that might give them a different perspective on what they did while they were in the bush.

#### **8.4. “You don't make army to fight amongst themselves, because we are all army”: Limit of Acceptable Violence**

Despite needing soldiers to fight in battle, and acquire food and fighters from the civilian population, the LRA does not require its recruits to be sadistic or overly violent. Indeed, the use of violence within the LRA is limited, and the

excessive use of violence against recruits is a punishable offence. Demonstrating that forced recruits are considered valuable assets, part of the LRA, using excessive and indiscriminate violence on recruits is punished. Thomas, a lieutenant, described the atrocities he committed against civilians and abductees alike in disturbing detail. Even the LRA was alarmed by his excesses, and reprimanded him for the violent punishment he initiated against the abductees under his command in response to an escape:

Thomas: So from there, one of my recruits escaped. So after, when he has escaped, I had to order, in the morning, or that my recruits to really be in pairs. After that, I ordered them to box themselves, until the blood comes out from wherever. So they started boxing themselves. So they fought, they fought, they fought, until one was like almost dying. Then I stop that. So when I stop that, my commander, the commanding Chief, the woman, came, and asked me, what happened? So I narrated that one of my people had escaped, so as being one way to really contain these people in the army, they should keep boxing each other, so that one should not give the opportunity for one another to escape. When you are enemy, and your enemy want to walk out, you cannot accept, you will say no, don't go away. If he is to escape, he will be reported. So when that man came, I explained to him, and he said, no, you have gone against the law. So, he took me to another big man, to another bigger man than him. So when I went there, he asked me what I had done... The general asked me what I had done, so explain to the general. The general told me, no, I have gone against the army law. So what I'm going to do is, I'm going to be beaten 50 strokes. Because when you are in the army, you don't make army to fight amongst themselves, because we are all army, and if you get fight, it means we can shoot ourselves, so it is not allowed. So you are going to be given 50 strokes. So he ordered the soldiers to go and get sticks for me. Now, when my boss ordered me to be tortured, to be caned, fifty strokes, I accepted. I lay down, but some of his friends, some of his generals, said no. Today is the first time, and this is a qualified soldier, and he has taken long in this war. So I think he should not be caned. So the general said, no, I have now excused him but I will give 25 strokes. I have excused you. So he gave me 25 strokes, and I went home.

Thomas was reprimanded for misusing his position of power over the recruits. He punished them for another recruit escaping, and was told that he had gone against the army law, and so he in turn was punished. There are strict rules of conduct within the LRA, and that these laws serve to protect the recruits

against excessive violence from commanders. The importance of unity within the group is clear, when the general tells Thomas “you don't make army to fight amongst themselves”. Thomas was shown some lenience because he was evidently a good soldier and therefore a valuable member of the LRA, but he was still punished. He also accepts his punishment, and did not display an anger or resentment when he told me this story. The narrative demonstrates that discipline is fundamental within the LRA, and excesses are punished. Violence is permitted when it achieves an end. Excessive violence is not tolerated or allowed.

#### **8.4.1. *Not Against Your Own People***

The standards of acceptable violence extend beyond the treatment of fellow LRA members, to the treatment of civilians. Committing violence against your own people is strongly prohibited. Their ‘own people’ are those from their village or community – it is not the Acholi people as a whole. There does not seem to be any real, unified Acholi identity in that respect. No one admitted committing atrocities – wilfully or not – against their own community, which previous research claims is an integral part of the initiation process (for example, see Amone-P’Olak, 2007). While it seems acceptable, or at least justifiable, to attack other people, there is an inherent restriction on attacking your own people, which is not acceptable or justifiable. Arthur told me that he fought for the safety of his family. He did not harm civilians, because to do so would mean doing the same to his own people. George related his return had been simplified because he had followed this edict:

George: When I came home I never had difficulty with my own community, because I had not killed anybody from my homeland.

Thomas, too, related how he had chosen to spare a relative of his:

Thomas: We came in late ambush, as planned on earlier, so our main aim was to wait for army, that is UPDF, or armed vehicle only, not civilian. So we laid ambush, we waited, after a short while, we see a mzee coming. That man was my uncle, a brother to my father. But from a distance, because I was at the

last point from the ambush, so after a short time, I got up and I wanted to go relieve myself, and I said no let me also go and see the person who is, who has been abducted that. So when I went there, I found that this is my uncle. So I told the other soldier, who was detaining him to leave, because I am a soldier, and he is also a soldier. I told him, you let this man go, because this is my person. You a soldier, I also a soldier, I cannot share this kind of the army, and we walk together with my uncle. So I told him to leave.

This could have been for the practical reason. It is to their community or village that the rebel would have to return, which would be difficult had they slaughtered members of that community. But the reason seems to have more to do with a sense of loyalty to their own people. Indeed, some claimed that not only did they not attack their own people, but they had in fact spared their own people – a story they discussed as they sat in the protection of the Establishment.

James: My name help me, my name [*name*] was so renowned, just that where ever you go, the government knows my name, everyone knows my name, and because of having a good heart in the bush, I used to help, because there are those ones that come from where I come from, they escaped from the Bush.

Samuel told me that the LRA Colonel Thomas Kwoyelo, who was tried for war crimes at the International Crimes Division of the High Court in Gulu, was different from his, and other LRA commanders, on the grounds that Kwoyelo attacked his own people:

Samuel: Kwoyelo's case is quite different from the others, because Kwoyelo was also doing something bad to his clan. As he was saying, he was helping his people go home, Kwoyelo was not helping his people. So those charges come from his own.

Thomas, the lieutenant who had so brutally treated his recruits, related how he too had taken steps to ensure he did not accidentally kill some of his own family while he participated in a massacre:

Thomas: But I decided as their commander, that what do you see if we are to go and launch the attack at 8 AM in the morning. Then we should follow the main road, going to... Actually, as we are going for that launch. Then even their commander accepted. That for me, the reason I decided to go in

daytime, I had a feeling that if we are to come at night, I may kill my own people. I wants to come in daytime when I can identify them (laughter).

The importance attached to not killing your own people is demonstrated in other groups by the fact that killing members of an abductee's family or community is an important part of the initiation process that prevents the abductee from leaving the group (e.g. see Denov, 2010).

## **8.5. “We are just like chickens, won't he kill us all?” Victims of Violence**

### **8.5.1. Sexual Violence**

Sexual violence is the one area where violence is not strategic or instrumental, but an outlet for men to victimise women. Women are subject to forced marriages to commanders, when they are given to a man with rank, and raped. Female commander Grace explained how 'marriage' worked in the LRA:

Grace: There is no proper marriage. So we can go, and abduct ladies, and bring them with us, and then we shall line them up, and then bosses will come and pick each and every lady, and direct the lady to go to either Sanir, Giller, Stockry, these are bigger groups, that within there, those ladies will be given to any commander's, or big person there, and will become the wife of that person there. And others will also be taken to Control Alter. Control Alter is now where Kony is. And will be taken there, and the escort for Kony, or for Otti, or for anybody will now...We cannot make choice. The man you are taken to is your husband. We have no choice to choose the man you want to stay with.

Nevertheless, sexual violence is very much regulated. There are strict rules around sexual conduct. Women cannot be 'married' until they reach puberty:

Florence: When you are young, they call you *ting ting*. *Ting ting* is the name given to young girls before seeing period...They normally choose to be become wife when you stop being *ting*

*ting*. The very first day you start the period is the day you be taken off and have sex. And they [the commander] normally say, today I am going to go off and celebrate my Christmas, when actually you are going to get a new wife, who has been from *ting ting* to adulthood, because they believe from *ting ting* to adulthood, when you start seeing period, that's when we believe to be an adult. So from that kind of *ting ting* to my adulthood. If anyone is going to have you sexually, they announce it out, today I'm going to celebrate my Christmas, by sleeping with a young girl, who is from *ting ting* to adulthood.

Lower ranking male commanders have to be given a woman. They cannot choose a 'wife', nor can they choose if they wanted a 'wife'; neither the woman nor the man have a say in the matter:

Richard: But the only thing like if you want to have a woman as your wife, you don't, you are not the one to choose. Someone else is to choose for you. Whether you capture that woman, no, someone has to choose the, you the woman.

Another rule is that a man can only rape his forced 'wife', and sex outside 'marriage', for either party, is punishable by death:

Grace: Those two people, the people who committed adultery will be shot. That is a rule there that everybody must follow. So if you have a wife to even to you, don't go outside [the marriage], and if you are given a husband, don't go outside.

Sexual violence is thus confined to the 'forced marriage', meaning that a woman would only be raped by one man. In other rebel groups, such as the RUF in Sierra Leone, it has been reported that female abductees would be raped indiscriminately by male soldiers, and would even seek a 'marriage' with a commander to protect themselves, viewing regular abuse by a 'husband' as preferable to gang rape (Denov, 2010). These rules around sex mean that this is not the case, within the LRA, sex is confined to 'marriage, and conversely does seem to protect women from far greater sexual victimisation, as they have been subject to in other rebel groups (McKay and Mazurana, 2004, Park, 2006).

Replicating a traditional structure of marriage is also important for reproduction, because children are born within 'wedlock', and the father is known. The commanders could all tell me how many children they have, albeit with

several women, as top commanders have many 'wives'. I even met some of them. Samuel has ten children, Charles has eleven and James has eighteen. All were taking responsibility for their children, paying their school fees and contributing to their care and upbringing.

Despite all of this, 'marriage' within the LRA is little more than institutionalised rape, where women are abused for the benefit of men. But women are not – as they have so often been portrayed in previous literature – passive victims. Florence – the forced wife of Otti Lagony, Kony's second in command until he had him executed, before she became Kony's forced wife – disclosed how she refused sex with Otti Lagony.

Florence: Even if a very big one [commander] comes in after the period, you will have to sleep [with him], you will have no option. You will have to accept. It was a bit kind of difficult, because from there, Otti-Lagony called me, and Otti is a very huge, tall man, huge, and fat and tall. So I was really very young. So he called me to his house, I refused one day. Then he called me, he called one of the other girls, called [*name*], she also refused. He left us. Then the next day, he called, we refused. He had to beat us. The scars are here. We were beaten seriously. He said you are trying to joke with him.

On another occasions, she related:

Florence: one day Otti-Lagony called us, it was a day to Christmas, so he called me [for sex], I refused, he called one of the girls, she also refused. He ordered us to stand until morning, and we stood from evening to morning, and he poured cold water on our head, and he was beating us. So we were beaten, tortured, badly.

What is interesting about these accounts is that when Florence refuses the commander's demands for sex, he responds by violently punishing her, but not by raping her. Rape is not used as a punishment, so sexual violence is not instrumental in terms of controlling or breaking down the psychological resistance of a woman. Even though Florence said she had no option, she still exercised agency by refusing sex. This is the only example of defiance or resistance that I came across in my research. Prior research details how forced recruits found ways to resist the indoctrination of the rebel group, such as women grouping



together in female solidarity against male domination, or by purposefully failing to kill combatants in battle, not ingesting drugs, or helping civilians (Denov, 2010; Denov and Maclure, 2009; Maclure and Denov, 2006). But refusing the LRA commanders sex is the only instance of resistance that my participants reported.

### **8.5.2. Top Commanders as Victims**

Violence is used to weed out the weak or bad recruits, prevent desertion and punish those who transgress the rules, but the top commanders are the most vulnerable to unpredictable violence. All six of the top commanders I interviewed report being beaten or locked up on Kony's orders.

Arthur told me that he was very close with Kony for quite some time, but they had a fallout when Kony arrested him and sentenced him to death, ordered the execution, but pardoned him. Arthur was then put into solitary confinement, and held in detention. He was released, and then subsequently re-arrested on Kony's orders. He could not give me a clear reason for these arrests, or the threat of execution. Indeed, he did not appear to understand himself why he had been treated this way – instead, it seemed to be arbitrary, on Kony's whim. Samuel told me that he was beaten:

Samuel: I was once beaten with 300 strokes.

Interviewer: What for?

Samuel: The teaching. Because there are people who want to do atrocities. Bad things. But for me, I do want them to do such things.

Off tape, he explained further that Kony perceived him to be questioning his teachings. Kony also executed two of his second in commands. Otti Lagony was executed by firing squad in 1999. Colin, Otti Lagony's protégé, explained the reason for his execution:

Colin: Otti-Lagony became the army commander, the second in command to Kony...Now, when he's coming, things changed, because they're saying Otti-Lagony want to change the whole army, to be his own. By then, Kony had a very serious plan other soldiers could cross, enter from Congo and go and fight

Uganda, and others should come straight from northern region. This because we had nine West Nile Bank Front [another rebel group] fighting, by that time, we had combined ourselves and we were together. So, it became so controversial that others were saying if Otti-Lagony is a good fighter from the north, so if he is to join the West Nile Bank Front, from the Congo, he will enter from there, and as he is a good fighter, he will overthrow the government, and Kony from here will not have the access of coming to the government, so Otti is going to be the field man so that will not work. This was because most, all of the soldiers like Otti-Lagony so much, until it came to the point the rumours came out, and Otti was arrested and killed.

Otti Lagony's former forced wife put it more simply:

Florence: It was until Otti-Lagony ...had an idea of defecting, so Joseph Kony knew, and ordered them to be arrested. After arrested, they were taken to – they were punished, until when they were killed. So when they were killed, honestly I felt happy, because I was relieved.

ICC indictee Vincent Otti was also executed by firing squad in 2007. Colin explained that it was issues relating to the failed Juba Peace Talks that resulted in Otti being put to death:

Colin: Otti Vincent was killed because there was a problem among the delegates, and even together himself with Kony...When we were in for the peace deal, when the CPA [Comprehensive Peace Agreement] was supposed to be signed at last, by the Otti Vincent was talking to Salim Saleh direct. So, he said Salim Saleh is brother to the President, so really set on how the structure of the army should be. ..Then problem came among delegates, for positions that will be appointed. So those soldiers, those officials they started rivalling for positions, until when they reported back to Kony, because they could not understand, they cannot who will be maybe the head of the president and so on. So the problem came from [Caesar] Accellam really, who took a bad report to Kony... So that is what brought Otti's death.

Interestingly, Colin, who witnessed the execution, related that two other commanders were executed alongside Otti, and all were from Atiak, in Amuru district, which is near the South Sudan border:

Colin: Then immediately, when he [one of the condemned] entered, they started kicking him, they were saying, you Atiak

boys, you think you are very wise, today we shall finish your tribe.

The tribal divisions, even though they are all Acholi, are very clear. It appears that when Kony murdered one of his top commanders, he would also kill their tribe folk, presumably out of the fear that they could be loyal to the executed commander<sup>17</sup>. Colin also reported that when Otti-Lagony was executed, he too was locked up and almost put to death on Kony's orders, because he came from the same place as Otti-Lagony. He was spared, probably on account of his age. That any perceived threat to Kony's power or authority resulted in punishment or death reveals him to be a somewhat paranoid leader.

The threat of unpredictable violence no doubt serves to keep the top commanders in line, to prevent them from having any ideas of defecting or overthrowing Kony. Unlike with the violence used against new recruits or lower ranking members of the LRA, this violence does appear to be indiscriminate, whereby it makes no distinction between guilt or innocent, the perception of insubordination is all it takes, meaning commanders cannot predict or avoid the violence. As such, all the top commanders live in fear of unpredictable violence, which no doubt serves as a check on their ambitions. Grace, a mid-level commander, expressed fear over Kony disposing of his top commanders:

Grace: This brought a lot of questions into our mind because of the nature of our leader, Joseph Kony. What he did, he started killing some of the top commanders, like Otti-Lagony, he killed Otti-Lagony, and when he killed Otti-Lagony, we said, eh, what is all this, because Otti-Lagony used to be a good fighter, and Kony even used to appreciate him, that's why he was army general. So, now, we thought of it, if Otti-Lagony is now dead, and Kony has killed, what about we people now? We are just like chickens, won't he kill us all? So that gave us a lot of ideas of leaving there.

The top commanders, on the other hand, are very loyal to Kony, even now that they are out of the bush. None of them chose to leave the LRA voluntarily –

<sup>17</sup> Ironically, Vincent Otti had led a massacre in Atiak in 1995, where around 300 people were killed.

possibly because of their fear of ICC indictment rather than their loyalty to Kony. All were captured or surrendered – depending on whose account you choose to believe – to the UPDF.

## **8.6. “Bush Morale”: Non-Violence**

For all its strategic use of violence, non-violence also plays an important role in creating a cohesive and supportive environment conducive to a successful rebellion. Andrew, a mid-ranking commander who had only recently left the bush when I interviewed him, called it ‘bush morale’. Violence may be an effective way to instil fear, ensure compliance and exert control over recruits, but it is not helpful in encouraging camaraderie between recruits. The LRA never used drugs or alcohol to control their recruits. The LRA does not want drugged fighting machines, it needs an effective, cohesive army, and that requires members who work together and look out for one another. In short, they need bush morale: not using violence, taking care of recruits, and making members responsible for one another. This is a side of the LRA experience not reported in the existing literature.

### **8.6.1. *Abduction***

I listened to accounts of abduction, not just from the abductees, but also from the people who had abducted them. Alfred, who was abducted at the age of fourteen, revealed that he was looked after when he was taken:

Alfred: When I have just been arrested, or abducted, its was not really hard by the way. Life was not easy, was not hard from there, because they could at least support us, we were still young, but those ones who were old, they use to harass them, beat them, even, beat them with the pangas [machetes], with the what, but life for us, we were young, we were being what, like, a little bit, what, we were being held with those ones who were, who had ranks there, they could look after us...commanders were keeping, were looking after us.

When he himself got rank and became a commander, he began abducting recruits, and he too treated them well:

Alfred: It was, with me, by then I'd already, what, stayed there for some good period of time. So they could maybe convince me, that tell them that life here is easy than home there, we used to get free things, chickens, if you want to eat meat you can even eat it daily, what. So, sometimes they could even just give me like a gun, I could just go and what, I just go and maybe play with it with those people. But they could not give me with, what, with these bullets. They just give me a gun without bullets, so I just play with those people.

Michael swiftly went from abductee to abductor and related that his role was to keep the new recruits alive. He tied them up to stop them escaping, but he also kept them safe, even without a weapon, by guiding them:

Michael: When I joined, some boss took me away, and told me I would be responsible for all the recruits who were abducted that very day. I should get a rope, and tie their waist all, and I must make sure that no one escapes. So he gave me a rope, I tied them all, and we entered into the ambush. I was not even having a gun, but I managed to keep these people, because I was telling them how to run, and which direction to follow. So we ran, and that one was from Soroti, that's how I got my rank. But loyalty is very good, because if you get a good boss, can really give you that rank.

### **8.6.2. *Taking Care of Recruits***

After abduction, and once recruits have passed the selection process, the LRA is focused on keeping them alive. This illustrates how the violence is instrumental, in that those who followed the rules will not be victims of violence. Recruits are valuable, because they are the LRA, and thus they are to be taken care of. This also helps to foster a group identity. Florence reported that she was treated after being stung by bees shortly after her abduction:

Florence: The next day after that day, I went and we head into some ambush. It was a serious war, and we started fighting. Unfortunately, the bullets, ok they shoot some behind, and the bees got scattered, and I didn't know, I entered there, because it was in the bush, in the forest, so when I entered they started stinging me all over. I ran, and fell, I almost died.... From

there, I had to really be taken back to the sick bay, it was a round the border. I stayed there for a long time, and they had to nurse me.

The commanders described how they took care of recruits, and one another. They demonstrated camaraderie. Richard related how he tried to take care of injured soldiers in his care, because an injured or dead soldier weakens the LRA's numbers:

Richard: So when I was given that rank, he gave me actually 15 soldiers as, I was in charge of them. So I had to ensure they are well, they're doing what, anything they are having problems, they now report to me, what can we do boss...So you ensure that these 15 are kept, and if you go to the fight, they don't want you to lose actually even a single soldier. So you lose a soldier, it means you are getting weaker everyday. So they don't want to, you have to aid them, so no one dies. And if anyone injures, gets an injury in fight you ensure that the person is taken back alive, with the injuries.

Thomas told how he took care of his commander when he was injured in fighting:

Thomas: There we started fighting, and we fought there. Many people were killed. When we were fighting, our two soldiers were killed. Our commanding chief, his name was [name], was shot in the leg and he fell down. So when I saw, I ran to him, and I ordered two soldiers to come and keep him, because, by then the fighting was not going on. I gave him two soldiers to keep him, and afterwards I started organising five more soldiers to come and carry him, and taken him away. And by then I was also organising soldiers to pick the wounded soldiers, so that they were all taken.

The LRA has to function as a unified body, and so it is important for members to take care of each other.

### **8.6.3. *Kony not Violent***

Despite the LRA's reputation for violence both in and out of the group (Jackson, 2002; Vinci, 2005), the leader of the LRA, Joseph Kony, was repeatedly referred to as not violent, and not supporting the use of violence.

Colin: What people say that, Kony give ranks to people for killing is not true.

Florence, Kony's former forced 'wife' also reported that Kony, unlike her first bush 'husband' Otti-Lagony, was not violent towards her:

Florence: Kony used to carry two of his women who had produced, and walk with them. And for us, if you have produced a kid, he will also walk with you, he will not make you to suffer...But I also have to thank that Kony used to walk with us, and when I was with, I never used to suffer, especially when he was walking, when we were walking together, there was no serious kind of punishment

My participants also reported that the violence that did occur was a result of the top commanders, who were acting against the orders of Kony:

Patience: Joseph Kony...he's not somebody bad. But those commanders, they are the bad people. Because sometimes, when they get out, they do things, just in their own things, in their own lives....I've never heard him telling those commanders to go and kill. I've never heard. Maybe he talks to them separately, or differently, I don't know, but I've never heard him.

Patience, ironically, was married to one of 'those commanders'. Susan reiterated what Patience said about Kony not condoning the behaviour of his commanders.

Susan: I must tell you that Kony never wanted people to be behave the commanders behaved, never wanted people to be killed, never wanted people to be abducted forcibly, he never wanted someone to go and kill. Only that those commanders came to the point where they were doing things on their own, because sometimes you hear, those days when I was there, used to stay in southern Sudan, with Joseph Kony, those commanders will be in Uganda, doing their own things. So, it became very difficult to control that, and I must tell you frankly that sometimes we have got to blame Kony, but sometimes we should not blame him, because he has have no civilian kill anybody. I've never seen it. And I not seen when I was in the bush.

While Susan had been close to Kony, and had first hand experience of how he acted and treated others, even the lower ranking commanders who were

not part of Kony's inner circle stated that Kony did not kill; rather, it was his commanders.

William: But even for him, he's not up to killing people, but his commanders, they are the one who always command to kill.

Interviewer: So his commanders make the decisions, not him?

William: Yes. For him, he doesn't want people to be killed.

None of the top commanders ever admitted committing any violence, whether Kony condoned it or not. These reports that Kony was not violent and yet his commanders were can be interpreted in two ways. Either Kony has successfully created propaganda against his top commanders within the group, and led people to believe they were to blame, which, given his penchant for beating, executing and locking them up, may have also been a tool to control the top commanders or, alternatively, Kony has little control over the behaviour of his commanders, which again may clarify why he is so afraid of them usurping his position, but also fails to explain why none of them successfully did.

The top commanders are allegedly mostly military men (Vinci, 2005), although only one of my participants admitted to having been in the UNLA, so they would be better placed to lead any army, as well as to know how best to utilise violence for maximum effect. Violence is not used indiscriminately nor randomly within the LRA. The LRA seeks to function as an army and, unable to get willing recruits, it is forced to use abduction to get soldiers. Through a strategic use of violence and fear, the LRA turn abductees into corpses or soldiers, then it instils discipline in recruits, punishing those who break the rules. Violence, as it is and is not used, is essential to maintain internal control within the group. If Kony is not condoning or sanctioning this violence, he would not have an army to head. The top commanders, if indeed they did have military training, must use their knowledge to create a functioning army of forced recruits. If Kony were just a figurehead without any real power to control commanders below him, why would he have not been removed? The answer to this lay not in military tactics, but in the spirits. Kony, after all, was seen as a spirit medium, and not as a general. It is this belief that made the top commanders subservient to him, and allowed him to impose authority over them, and the rest of the LRA.



## 9. Spirits

Sitting with James and Samuel at the Establishment, I got a rare insight into the LRA leader, Joseph Kony. Kony supports Manchester United football team, although unlike most Ugandans, he is not a huge follower of the English Premier League. He is, however, a big fan of Congolese music. They also said Kony never goes into battle – he does not fight – but if there is an ambush, he runs like the rest of them. These descriptions were in stark contrast to the popular imagery of Joseph Kony, the child kidnapping, ICC indicted warlord. This actually made him sound rather human. The commanders, nevertheless, still believed that he was a messiah. James fully brought into the spiritual aspect of the LRA, and Samuel once again referred to Kony as the son of God.

While the LRA was a successor to Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Movement, previous literature reports that the spiritual aspects that were so central to Alice's movements have been replaced with more conventional military strategies (Behrend, 1999a; Pham et al., 2005). Alice's goal to purify the Acholi people is reported as having been replaced in favour of massacring the Acholi people and the objective of the rebellion – and it is debatable if there were one at all – has become the more tangible aim of trying to overthrow the government (Justice and Reconciliation Project, 2008; Lomo and Hovil, 2004; Vermeij, 2011). This move to military tactics was no doubt a necessity after the failure of Alice's rebellion due to its lack of combative power, and has been attributed to the assimilation of former UNLA/UPDA soldiers into Kony's group, who had been properly trained by Obote's army (Pham et al., 2005; Vinci, 2005).

Of the top commanders interviewed, all but one had been with the LRA since the 1980s, and had joined, unwillingly, as adults. Only one admitted that he had been part of the UNLA, and Colin was the only child abductee that had risen through the ranks and become part of Kony's inner circle. Susan was not a top

commander – she had received the rank of second lieutenant – but she had been with the LRA since 1988, and had been very close to Kony, as a medic. As confidantes of Kony, it is these seven who told me about the religious aspects of the LRA's rebellion, and of the spirits that they believe talk through Kony. To the top commanders at least, the spiritual aspects of the group have neither been forgotten nor sidetracked to accommodate military tactics; they are just as central to the group and its aims as they had been for Alice's HSM. But this seems to be true only for the top commanders and those close to Kony. For the lower ranking recruits, they know or understood little of what the spiritual aspects of the LRA are, and they still believe the goal of the LRA is to overthrow the government. The spirits are important for them insofar as they believe that Kony can read their minds, which means that he would know if they try to escape. This appears to be a very effective control mechanism to retain them in the group.

Appeals to religion also appear frequently in the interviews. The Biblical notion of death as the punishment for sin featured heavily throughout the narratives, and like the Holy Spirit Movement soldiers before them, they believe that people who are sinful, or fail to follow the rules of the LRA, will be killed. This – unlike the punishment meted out by the LRA as discussed in the previous chapter – is divine retribution, and death may come in battle, or at the hands of the LRA, but it is from God and is unavoidable.

Survival, on the other hand, served as evidence to some participants that they have not done anything wrong or bad. The beliefs became self-legitimising, with those who survive believing they have done so because they are sin-free, and the plethora who died are blamed for their own deaths. Unlike the HSM, the LRA has the military capability to successfully repel or ambush the UPDF. The spirits are an effective means to justify the actions of the LRA and to avoid responsibility.

## 9.1. “Big people have big ideas also”: The Spirits

According to prior research, Kony was initially possessed by the spirit Lakwena, the same spirit who possessed Alice Auma and had headed the HSM (Behrend, 1999a). Although this seemed to be a transient possession, it has been reported that he went on to be possessed by other spirits. The top commanders explained to me how they understood the spirits:

Interviewer: Was it always one spirit? Or was there more than one.

Charles: More than one. Ah, it's more. It's about 11 to 15...he has a different spirit for medical, some for medical, some for war, some for intelligence section, some for money. Yes. Some for teaching.

Interview: Teaching what?

Charles: The word of God. Teaching only the word of God.

But when I asked the commanders the names of all the spirits, I was amused that they referred me to a book written by a Swedish researcher. Alice's HSM is recorded to have had 140,000 spirits, all of whom had specific tasks, and existed in a hierarchy, with the spirit Lakwena at the head (Behrend, 1999a). The LRA has adopted an aspect of the spiritual beliefs of the HSM, but made it more manageable by having far fewer spirits. The LRA's spirits also had some language proficiency:

Interviewer: Do the spirits speak in Lwo<sup>18</sup>?

James: It is hard to tell, because each spirit speak different languages, that is why we even have the Arab<sup>19</sup>. So when the spirit comes to him [Kony], or is talking through him, some will speak in Lwo, others will be translated. So the spirits speak in different languages. It depends where that spirit is coming from. Arab spirit will speak in Arabic, if it is a white spirit it will speak [English]. It is always translated, in all different languages, because Kony will not know everything, after the spirit has left. So, he has a secretary, called Chief, and he will list everything down, and it will be communicated. And if it was something that too much communication, the next day the

<sup>18</sup> The language of the Acholi people.

<sup>19</sup> The term 'Arab' was usually a reference to the Sudanese.

soldiers will be readdressed, so that they know the rules and regulations within the army, such that no one should really neglect anything, because if you neglect, you will be killed.

The spirits take on an anthropomorphic form, having nationalities and a race, as well as speaking in the appropriate foreign language. The spirits speak languages that Ugandans would have had the potential to be exposed to, like English or Arabic, and which someone would have the ability to translate. Having foreign spirits who speak other languages gives an international dimension to the spirits, and suggests that they transcend the Acholi. The purpose of the spirits, and the source of their power, is their ability to tell Kony the future:

Edward: When you pray everyday, but when there is war, the spirit will know. Kony ask that [inaudible], so he will say in three months, he may even mention the month, there will be war. The enemy is even now preparing, they are coming this number, they even tell the number. So the spirit will now tell people how to fight that thing, and sometimes we go and fasting. Maybe, one week, maybe, one full month, forty days, fast. Then, after fasting, the spirit will say tomorrow, at this time, there will be war. So, they will select. He [Kony] will come and select, he is the one who selects. So, he will sometimes come with the glass of water, you line up, and if you are seen lying down like this, they will not pick you, because they will say you will die. But when they see you standing, you will be picked. That's how they pick. And the number will be also determined by the spirit. 1,000, they may send 50 to fight 2,000, it can even be reduced to 25. One hundred, even ten. So when they pick 100, 200, or fifty, then the rest will continue to pray for these people. They said, we want these people to reach this place, you will go and meet them on the way, and the first person can we say he is a witch, shoot straight, the first bullet will – so they go, they will meet there, and the people in the LRA camp will only hear the bombs and the gun, and then we see them come up. Some are wounded, some are not, so that is how it is.

The spirits play a very central role in the rebellion and the goals of the LRA. The HSM built on an already familiar Acholi tradition with regard to spirit mediums, which were already an accepted part of the culture. Priests acted as mediums (*ajwaka*) for *jogi* (singular: *jok*) which were beneficent spirits, but unlike Kony and Alice's spirits, were not believed to reveal the future (Allen, 1991; Behrend, 1999a). Like the HSM before them, the LRA manipulates an ideology

that already has credibility and support within Acholi society, to give legitimacy to their own rebellion. Other rebel groups, such as Fremlino and Renamo in Mozambique, and Zimbabwe have all reported using spirit medium in their rebel movements, but this reportedly has been a tactic to gain support from the peasant population, rather than as a foundation within their internal structure (Wilson, 1992).

### **9.1.1. Rules**

The role of the spirits in the LRA, as with the HSM, is to provide rules for the soldiers to follow, which will keep them safe, and protect them from dying. Failure to follow the rules, on the other hand, means injury and even death for the transgressor. These successfully put the responsibility for the tactics in the hands of unaccountable spirits, and the burden for failure on the individual soldier. Samuel explained some of the rules to me, and the consequences when they are not followed:

Samuel: There is a law in the LRA, very many laws, do not drink, do not smoke, do not sleep with a woman who is not anointed, when people are going for what don't sleep near a woman.

Interviewer: So to be with a woman, they have to be anointed?

Samuel: To that, to be anointed.

Interviewer: So what does that mean?

Samuel: That is cleanse. You are to be clean. Don't eat the food of an anointed person. Very many laws, you are to follow.

Interviewer: And if you don't follow them?

Samuel: You are going to be in trouble. When you are going for war, don't eat. I've seen this one with my eyes. There was a person who, people were going for war, and he got cassava<sup>20</sup>, and he started chewing, and in the battlefield, and the bullet came to take this one out. And they brought the man to him, and he said I told you not to eat, and why did you eat? You are breaking the law. You are not to break the law. And among the LRA, you are not break the laws. The laws are very many. When crossing the river, you are to make the sign of the cross, and

<sup>20</sup> A root vegetable and a staple of the northern Ugandan diet.

asks the water to give you permission of crossing. Don't cook with the stone.

Interviewer: And what are the purposes of these laws?

Samuel: To keep you [safe]. The laws are from the spirits.

Within the HSM, there had been only twenty rules, known as the Holy Spirit Safety Precautions, which had all come from the spirit Lakwena (Behrend, 1999a). Within the LRA, there were far more rules to be followed, some of which seem practical to the well-being of the group. Samuel explained to me off tape that the prohibition against smoking and drinking was to prevent the UPDF from locating their position – smoking created smoke which could be seen and thus give away their position, and drinking alcohol could make soldiers loud and raucous, which could tip off the UPDF. Alcohol also dulled their senses and made them less capable as soldiers, should the group be ambushed. But other rules appear to the detriment of a military campaign, as Edward, a former soldier, told me:

Edward: We also had to start learning the new thing. Don't stand, don't lie down when you are fighting. Don't hide behind tree. So you can see the contrast now, with me who knew the military thing. You have to lie down, you have to protect yourself. It became very difficult for us. So that is how I joined. But you have to do certain rituals before you can be it, or greet other people. You cannot greet people when you first come as you are polluted. Those people who are there, they consider themselves clean, pure before God. You are coming, you are still dirty, filthy, with a lot of sins. You cannot touch those, those people, stay with them, and then after three days, there is some white clay, they mix it on you, that *moyaa*. Shea nut. That oil they use. Cross. All over, all over you. Then you have stay with it for three days, without washing. And after three days, they will take you to a river, then you submerge yourself, you submerge under water and up three times. When you have done it three times, you now wash, when you come out now, they consider you clean now. You can now greet people, you can eat together, you can now take back your clothes, put on your clothes.

The spirits' rules contain an emphasis on cleanliness, in the sense of being clean from sin, which is a legacy from Alice's HSM, where she had aimed to cleanse her soldiers from sin (Jackson, 2002). It is also rooted in religious

teachings, and the concept of cleansing sins appears throughout the Bible. This is something that would be very familiar to the Acholi, as Church is a central part of civilian life, and is something that even those who had had little or no formal education would know. Susan told me what happened when soldiers failed to follow these spiritual rules:

Susan: One of the laws state that during the war time, war period, one should not have sex. A man should not have sex with a woman. But you find that men were still going ahead and having sex. But that one there did not happen to both sexes, but it happens in most cases on men, and men died in great numbers than women. Another cause of those was, people were told not to abduct children, and if you abduct children, or if you have abducted them, you should not punish them, you should not beat them, but you could that find those commanders could still go ahead, and punish, still go ahead and beat, still go ahead and kill. So all those kind of behaviour brought us difficulties and death during our time.

Failure to abide by the rules means death in battle, and, as with the HSM, death in battle is attributed to sinfulness of the individual, rather than the superior ability of the opposing side. While this had been detrimental to the HSM, the LRA has the military capability to successfully engage in guerrilla warfare. The HSM, on the other hand, had attempted to take on the NRA in direct battle, and had met with a decisive and bloody defeat. The senior commanders of the LRA allegedly have military backgrounds (Pham et al., 2005), and so are able to succeed in combat, which serves in to support the belief in the spirits. As Alice found to her detriment, charismatic authority is dependent on success.

### **9.1.2. *Belief in the spirits***

The information I received about the spirits all came from Kony's top commanders, and Susan, his former medic. The people who are close to Kony know about the spirits, and believe in them. Samuel explained to me at what rank people usually got to be in Kony's brigade, Control Alter:

Interview: So how far up do you have to be to be close, to be part of Control Alter with Kony?

Samuel: that one is, he is the one selecting, and mostly it is the rank Brigadier. Stay with big people. Because big people have big ideas also.

Samuel then went on to tell me what happens when the spirits possess Kony:

Samuel: You know, when the spirit wants to come, he gathers people, he uses water, in a glass. People do class here in front of him, when the glasses filled with water then he dipped his hand in the water, then he pray. Then he fully make the sign of the cross then he will start talking... His mood will change, not to a normal person. He may look like a person who is drunk, but he, he is speaking words of wisdom.

Susan also believed in the spirits because of what she had witnessed when the spirit came to Kony:

Susan: But I must say clearly that I believe it is the spirits, because sometimes Kony sits like a human being, so when the spirit comes in him, he will start doing these different things. And I remember when he told us, for him, he's being guided by the spirit, and it is so hard and difficult to see the spirits. So, we will only judge wherever we shall go, and whatever we will do, by the spirit. If a good spirit will lead us, do good things, if it is a bad spirit, then we shall do something bad, and we shall see where it will take us. So that's what he told us one time.

Edward had also witnessed Kony's spiritual possession.

Edward: But by that time this thing was, I have to tell you, the spiritual thing. It is a real spiritual thing. When the spirit comes, he will start telling you different order. The spirit will tell you different orders, and you have to do it. And taking us there was useless, because all training are done by spirit. Yah.

The spirits cannot be seen, but cause changes in Kony's behaviour, and the commanders (and Susan) saw this as evidence of Kony's possession.

But for the lower ranking commanders, they do not really understand the role of the spirits or how they impact the LRA. They know Kony is allegedly possessed by some kind of spirit, but know little beyond that, and certainly do not appear to have witnessed Kony's possession. Richard, a corporal, knew that



Kony had a spirit, that controlled or guided him, but he was not able to articulate it in the same way the top commanders had:

Richard: The spirit, you know it's a very funny story as I also hear about it, because I cannot trace back to how it is started. You know, that spirit actually, he got possessed when he was still a young boy, think he was over 10 years, in their village there. So there is something controlling him. There is something that controls – he calls it the Holy Spirit. That's why they say the Lord's Resistance Army, the name is Lord. So there is something controlling him. He is not acting in the capacity of a normal human being. So the spirit thing, it's a very hard thing to talk about. I don't know anything about it completely, but yes, he's being guided by that. I know when he gives command, he says the Holy Spirit has said. The Holy Spirit.

William, who only received one rank, and Alfred, a sergeant, knew, as Richard had, that Kony was supposed to have spirits, but he did not know anything more about it:

Interviewer: What about the spirits? You said some people say he's a witch doctor.

William: We say because like for us, we don't know what he's using. But he's having maybe some spirits on him, which sends...but for us, we don't know. But what he used to be, he like having very many wife and children.

William knew little about the spirits, but was able to vouch for the harem Kony had of forced 'wives'. Alfred knew even less about the spirits than William did:

Alfred: I don't know really what kind of spirits that he has by the way... I don't know really, we are not being told about it, because when he's coming to that mountain, he always talk with his what, some of his, like those top, top people, like second lieutenant, what, like for us, they could not tell us such things, because they realise that maybe when we have been maybe, what, when we have escaped, we could just what, come and expose that one, that secret. So me, I have come home, I have come back without even knowing exactly that kind of spirit he has.

The top commanders know about the spirits, and have witnessed Kony's possession, but the lower commanders have not. Alfred admitted that the lower

ranking recruits are deliberately not told specifics about the spirits, in case they tell the UPDF. They are a risk with that kind of information. But it also demonstrates that it was not important for the lower ranking commanders to know about the spirits, or understand their role in the group. For the inner circle – those close to Kony – the spirits appear to be a central component of the group, to the running of the group, and to their individual survival. This suggests that it is important for Kony to maintain a control and power over those close to him through his abilities as a spirit medium. His authority rests on the top commanders believing in, and being subservient to, the power of the spirits, but this is not the case for the lower commanders, as they simply do not have the power to pose a threat to Kony's authority.

### **9.1.3. Goals of the LRA**

The belief in the spirits also affects the perceived goals of the LRA, with the top commanders believing that the goals of the rebellion are religious in nature, and they are fighting for the implementation of the Ten Commandments. The lower commanders, however, believe they are fighting for a more traditional goal of rebellion: to overthrow the government. James, a top commander, explained what he believed he had been fighting for:

James: We were fighting for the Ten Commandments. You know, it involves the spirits that he was using. So all those things were there. The word of God, that's why it's called the Lord's Resistance Army. So we were fighting for that.

Samuel echoed this, and said that the goal of the war was not just to bring the Ten Commandments to Uganda, but to the world beyond Uganda as well:

Samuel: I stayed with him, and I was near him, and I was hearing how he teaches people. There is one thing he said, if the spirit, is a bad spirit, is not going to last long, but if it is a good spirit, it's going to last long. You see how it is going. And there is one thing, people who say that he is becoming weaker, but he will stay. His time will come when he will burst. The whole world will know that he is still existing. And he says that he is not fighting, the spirit said he's not fighting Uganda...he's fighting SWW. Silent world war....to bring the Ten Commandments.

It is clear that the goals are intricately linked to the spirits, and the belief in Kony as a spirit medium. Charles also stated that the war was going to be international:

Charles: And let me tell you, the war of LRA is going to be international war, not a civil war. Once, a different country assist in a rebel, it means it is an international war. It means that it is an international war. He's fighting the whole world. He told us that everyone will live by [the Ten Commandments], even whites.

Nevertheless, when I asked if the rebellion was a religion war, Samuel was more circumspect, telling me:

Samuel: At the beginning, he started by saying that it is a religious war.

Interviewer: But now, is it still a religious war?

Samuel: You know, he keeps on changing. He is like a chameleon. When he go to Arabs, he changes, to be like Arabs. When he comes to Christians, he changes to be like a Christian.

Despite believing the goal of the LRA to be the implementation of the Ten Commandments, Samuel recognised that Kony himself was fickle and willing to fit in with whomever he needed on his side. The goals of the LRA appear to be bigger to Samuel, than Kony's human failings.

Unlike the top commanders, none of the middle or lower ranking participants stated that the goal of the LRA was religious. Instead, they all said that the goal is to overthrow the government. These three mid-level commanders all told me quite clearly that they had been fighting to overthrow the government, and that is what they had been told was the goal of the war:

Richard: The big one [Kony], in his vision, he's saying, he wants to overthrow the government. He wants to be in power. That was the major reason for fighting. Nothing else. He wants to be in power, he wants take seat of presidency. He was fighting to become the president. I think he's still doing that. Several years later.

Richard stated clearly that Kony wanted to be president and that is why he was – and still is – fighting. George reiterated this, but acknowledged the difficulties of attempting to do this with an army of forced recruits:

George: The goal was to overthrow the government. But people were killing, which made it difficult, because people were being forced, they were abducted forcefully, and someone who is abducted forcefully will walk out of the bush without our notice, and we could these are number reducing, and sometimes some of them can escape with our guns. Their tactics are okay, but we are few. We do not have support. To be successful. But the main aim is to what, fight the government.

George used the term we, which suggests that he might still identify with this cause. Alfred had also been told that the goal of the LRA was for Kony to be president, and he knew nothing about the religious goals that the top commanders had told me about.

Alfred: Kony, that he also want to rule Uganda, that he want to be a president, that what I used to hear, at my age, that he want to rule what, his people... he used to tell us that maybe when I become a president, you are, you'll be under my control, I'll maybe give you some good positions, and really I even think he would be, what, be the President.

Interviewer: Did they mention anything about the Ten Commandments, or trying to rule Uganda according to that?

Alfred: I didn't heard about that, that Ten Commandment.

Interviewer: Were there any rituals in the LRA, like praying? Any religious or spiritual rituals?

Alfred: No.

William, a low ranking commander, did not even know the goals of the LRA nor did not know about the aim of overthrowing the government.

Interviewer: So what are the LRA fighting for?

William: That one for me, even, I don't know. But other people from there, in the bush, if they get the money they can just pick the money, but most things, when we are coming this way, we look for food, we all want food. But about looking for presidency, I don't know. Because the way I see, from there, we just plan to come here, we stop. Then we look for any food, and go back with it.

Interviewer: But there's no overarching goal that the LRA would tell you about what they were trying to do?

William: Cannot tell us. Maybe tell to those big people. That's it.

Given that the mid-level commanders know little about the spirits and are not full believers in the same way as the top commanders, it is not surprising that they therefore were not told that the goals of the LRA were based around this religious purpose. The goal of overthrowing the government serves as a motivating cause for them, the way the religious goals serve to motivate the top commanders. It is also possible that they are not told of the same goals as the top commanders because they are less bound to the group, and therefore more likely to leave and expose this goal to the UPDF. The low ranking recruits, however, appear not to have been informed of any goals, because they are too unimportant and expendable to inform of any goals, or to need to motivate them to fight. The need for survival is probably reason enough to get them to fight.

## **9.2. “God will also be on your side”: Religion**

Religion is important to the LRA teachings. Alice Lakwena had combined familiar Acholi myths with Christian teachings, from the Old Testament for her HSM (Behrend, 1999a), and the LRA adopted many of these amalgamations. The spirits and spirit mediums come from Acholi tradition. Religion – specifically Christianity<sup>21</sup> – plays a very central role in the lives of ordinary Acholi. I was often asked during my time in Gulu where I went for prayers. Not if I went for prayers, but where I went. It was a given that I would go to a church. And in Gulu, there were a lot to choose from. The Bible is something most Acholi children would be familiar with, and it serves as an accessible basis for the belief system of the group, and provided legitimacy for the rebellion. Religion gives a meaning to life, and creates unity, which would help to foster solidarity within the LRA.

<sup>21</sup> According to the 2002 Census, about 85% of Ugandans are Christian (Uganda Population and Housing Census, 2002).

Furthermore, religion becomes more important in times of trouble – such as war – because it provides solace and hope (Hockey, 2003). Samuel and Susan both offered religious interpretations of the Joseph Kony and the LRA rebellion:

Samuel: You know, for me, I'm like Thomas, with Jesus, I want to see the thing, and see if it's real. But I was so close, seeing it, this thing is true. But the words he speaks are so full of wisdom. And this thing is very difficult to understand, it will take years for people to understand this thing. It is similar to the one of, what was a disciple of Jesus? More killing people, and Jesus turned him to be his disciple... Paul. It is similar to the one of Paul. The one of Paul, people did not believe, it disturbs the people of the Jews very much. People didn't believe that people was... That Paul was having this experience. It disturb people, this thing is going to disturb people like that one. People will not agree, but for us who have stayed with him, you may sometime agree.

Samuel compared himself to various apostles, while Susan reported what Kony had told them, and he had compared himself Biblical characters.

Susan: So, there was a day Kony made a remark that if it is out of your sinfulness that cause me trouble to cross over the Nile, and I will go and die there that will be your own cause, and no one will blame me. You will be digging your own graves. When we were in Sudan, Kony told us that I, Joseph, I will be like Moses, that God told him, you will take your people home, or else if I fail to take you people home, then my follower, my assistant will take you home, and I will go, and die on the way, as Moses did, when Jesus told him that you will have reached Canaan, but because of your sinful acts, you will not reach Canaan, you will die on the way.

Both accounts somewhat confuse Biblical teachings (Canaan, for example, is only mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament), and demonstrates that religious teachings could be manipulated to support Kony and his war. Religion is a powerful mechanism for all the LRA members, and the lower commanders themselves appeal to God to justify what they are doing. They would claim God was on their side to demonstrate they were not doing anything wrong:

Esther: Even all of us were going to die, only God was standing with us.

Esther saw God as protecting her from death, while Richard viewed his ability to be a successful commanders as evidence that God was on his side:

Richard: God will also be on your side. You do your part, where you cannot, God will help you. So I did come on doing 15 people, but fortunately enough, none of them escaped and none of them sustained serious injuries in the battlefield so I was monitoring them well. And of course God was also on my side.

This is a belief whereby survival or success is seen as evidence of its legitimacy, and the LRA has the relative military success to sustain this.

### **9.2.1. *Sin and Cleanliness***

The concept of cleanliness and sin is present throughout the Bible, where sin is portrayed as something unclean that can be purged. For example, in the Old Testament book of Isaiah “Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil” (1:16). In the Gospel according to John in the New Testament, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:19). This ideology was adopted by the LRA, who view sin as unclean and impure. Edward stated that the LRA began abducting children because they are free from sin – they were cleaner than adults:

Edward: We are people are sin, we are not clean.

Interviewer: So the children were taken because they were cleaner?

Edward: Yeah. That’s how – but they say that when a child is young, he is like an empty cassette. I think the reason why.

Likewise, young girls are taken to be wives because they have not yet reached puberty and therefore are seen as clean:

Patience: One day, one time, he came and ordered that every lady who has never seen, who does not see period to come and start cooking, because they believe that whoever might have seen period is already kind of, you know, either sinful or someone not clean.

Previous research suggests that pre-pubescent girls were taken, and made wives when they started menstruating because they were more likely to be virgins and therefore free from disease, especially HIV/AIDS (HRW, 2005). While being infection-free may be considered clean, Susan went on to explain that it was menstruation that was considered unclean:

Susan: Another cause of death, this I don't know if laws or regulations, I don't understand, you know best how to put them. Another cause of death was one of the laws, rules said that if a woman is in for her period, she should not touch anything, she should not sleep with a man, she should sleep in an isolated room, or hut, and no men should enter there. So if it happens, all the soldiers who sleeps or enters there will be killed, and will die just during the course of the war, and such a human being will not even touch a girl or a woman, because we believe that will cause kind of sin before the solders.

Although Susan did not reference it, the Bible refers to menstruation as being unclean, and describes how a woman – and anyone who touches her – will be unclean for seven days as a result of this (Leviticus 15:19-23).

### **9.2.2. *Divine Punishment***

A central theme of the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) is that death is the punishment for sin. According to the Book of Genesis, death came as a result of Adam and Eve eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and thereby disobeying God (Genesis 2:17; also referred to in Romans 5:12-21 and I Corinthians 15:20-26). The cause of death is individual sin. Similarly, under the LRA beliefs, death is the divine punishment for sin. Unlike the threat of receiving punishment for transgressing the LRA rules, death here is accounted for because of sin. Samuel referenced Biblical examples of divine retribution

Samuel: There was a question I asked him, that why are people being killed? He referred me to the Old Testament, that at the time of Moses, the Egyptians were killed, when they were following their Sabbath. The wall in Jericho fall, and people from Jericho were all killed. That is what he was telling me. Because when I with him, I asked him very many question... who's mistake was that one? When people were all killed. And Sodom and Gomorrah, people were all killed, whose mistake was that one? When the Egyptians were killed, the soldiers were



drowned in the sea, whose mistake was that?... It is very difficult to answer that one. It was referring to my question.

Samuel referred to several examples of where people were killed in divine retribution. While this belief finds its legitimacy in the Old Testament teachings, for the LRA, it appears to serve more as a very effective means of internal control:

Interviewer: So if you follow the rules...

Samuel: You will be alive. But if you break one, you are going sometime to get injured.

The incentive to obey the rules of the LRA is to stay alive. Susan and James both believed that casualties in war came as the result of people's disobedience:

Susan: What brought a lot of death in the bush was that most of the soldiers were not following the laws in the army, the LRA laws set. So, the laws set on women, children, abduction and many others, people were not following, and that brought a lot of death.

James noted that soldiers knew the rules, and if they chose to disobey them, they would die.

James: Soldiers will be readdressed, so that they know the rules and regulations within the army, such that no one should really neglect anything, because if you neglect, you will be killed.

Edward further explained that sin caused death, specifically that being clean meant a person had a spirit above his or her head, and the UPDF would only see the spirit, and shoot at the spirit. If the spirit was not there, because a person had sinned, the UPDF would see the person and be able to shoot him. This HSM also believed that soldiers that obeyed the rules had a spirit above their head (Behrend, 1999a):

Interviewer: So don't they have a lot of casualties?

Edward: Sometimes not. What he explained to us, that most of the UPDF, they shoot up, that's how they fight LRA, fight now, they say that your spirit will be up, on top of you, so they will see the spirit instead of, that's why they fire up, because they

don't see – but if you make a mistake, then that spirit will disappear, and they will see you, and they will get you.

Interviewer: And what if you don't follow the rules outside of war, are you more likely to be killed?

Edward: Yah. The moment you don't follow what the spirit is, you will get that. Or sometimes, they will say don't smoke, and you smoke cigarette, you will be shot.

Interviewer: So it is like punishment?

Edward: Yeah. You don't have sex, and usually you don't have sex, but if you do have sex, you will be shot here, in the privates...so people, you get disciplined by yourself.

One of the top commanders also reported that a goal of the LRA is to punish people – starting with the Acholi - as a whole because of their sinfulness. Samuel attributed the LRA's move to the Congo to Kony's decision to start punishing another a group of people, and that the Acholi had suffered their punishment and so now got to be 'free':

Samuel: He [Kony] also said that the time will come when the people of northern Uganda will be free. That's why he went to Congo, he wanted not to disturb the people of northern Uganda. He wanted not to keep the war in northern Uganda, because he's near there. He wanted to go to the countries that are far from northern Uganda, because he said these people are the first people to get punishment, so, their time has come, to be free from punishment... these people of the North have suffered enough. He is going to stop in Karuma<sup>22</sup>. These people are going to be free.

The belief in death for disobedience is not reserved for the top commanders – it is a belief shared by everyone I interviewed, and probably is transmitted throughout the whole group because it is a familiar concept that they would have been exposed to in Church:

George: Normally Kony comes once, he normally comes to address the general army, especially when they gave tough wars, he will come and tell us what to be done, and how we can go by that. So if he gives directives, and we fail it, we will be killed.

<sup>22</sup> Karuma Falls is considered the divide between the north and south of Uganda.

If it is difficult to sustain a theology when a lot of people keep dying, as Alice Lakwena found out. Like in the HSM, the death of soldiers in battle was blamed on their own disloyalty. Even if the soldiers had outwardly appeared to follow all the rules, in their heart they were still not loyal, and that is what caused them to be killed. This made the belief self-legitimising – even if Richard himself was not convinced:

Interviewer: So if you do the prayers, and you have the holy water, and you do get injured, what does that mean?

Richard: They say you are not loyal. You don't pray with all your heart when you get injuries in the field, say you, the spirit has failed to protect you because you are not loyal to him. That is what they say. So that was just... I think it was, to me it wasn't true, because now there are people who can pray with all their heart to the spirit, but still they die in the battlefield.

The central tenet that death is the punishment for sin must be highly attractive to those commanders who make it out alive. It permits them the assurance that they have not done anything wrong or sinful, because they have not died. Edward, for example, attributed God with his safe return from the bush:

Interviewer: So did he do that [execution] to a lot of commanders?

Edward: Yeah, he did. Some he killed.

Interviewer: Did that scare you?

Edward: I think God was the one protecting me, by not keeping me there, in the field. He would have killed me. He took me away from there.

Likewise, female commander Grace saw her continued existence as proof that she had nothing wrong:

Grace: Many people, regardless of sex died, so when I am here talking to you, I thank God, that I am alive. Sometimes, I been thinking maybe I have not done anything bad to anyone, that is why God might have blessed me. So, I have not done anything, I can see myself alive here.

### 9.3. “Kony is just a normal human being”: Joseph Kony

Little is known about Joseph Kony. He remains something of an enigma. I was able to get a closer look at who the ICC indicted leader was, through the people who were closest to him – his top commanders. Prior research reported that he was a soldier of the UPDA prior to forming his own Holy Spirit Movement (Lomo and Hovil, 2004; Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999), but his top commanders refuted this, telling me he had been a civilian.

Interviewer: Was Kony in the UNLA?

Edward: No, he was just an ordinary – because of that spirit.

Interviewer: When did the spirit come to him?

Edward: In that year, [19]98, [19]86, [19]87 that time. A civilian, but the spirit came.

Samuel confirmed what Edward had told me:

Interviewer: So was he [Kony] a soldier before he started the LRA?

Samuel: No, he was a civilian. That thing came to him, the spirit.

James stated that it was the spirits that changed Kony:

James: Kony is just a normal human being. And if the spirit's coming, and he will change, and tell us the spirit is coming. The moment it comes, he will change. And even we, the soldiers [inaudible], the big man up there.

For Susan, the coming of the spirits not only changed Kony, but also absolved him of responsibility for what he did as a result of this possession:

Susan: Yes, it is the spirit, making Kony to do all those work, because Kony first of all was a very poor man, and he was a pupil of primary six, so he didn't know anything, and before he was not even a soldier. So this thing came in him like that, roughly, and he became a soldier, and he started staying in the bush with only six people. Imagine that. So it is not just himself, but the spirit.

Kony is not a military man, and has had no military training. According to James, he does not even fight: “Kony does not involve himself in any fighting. He always sends his commanders to be on the forefront.” It is somewhat unusual for a rebel leader to have had no experience as a soldier, nor any training, but to still lead an armed rebellion. This would seem to be a prerequisite for the job. Bosco Ntaganda, for example, the Congolese warlord and fellow ICC indictee, is reported to have been very active in battle, and would personally go into villages to recruit soldiers (Agence France Presse, 26th March 2013). The late head of the SPLA, John Garang, too, received formal military training in the US, and became an officer in the Sudanese army before mutinying and heading a rebellion (Phombeah, 3rd August 2005). Given that his commanders apparently do have experience of warfare, it is not detrimental to the LRA that their leader does not, but it does bring into question how Kony has managed to maintain his position of authority over these commanders, given his lack of knowledge, and given how essential that would be for a rebel leader to have. Why have none of his commanders overthrown him and taken over? This insecurity may explain why Kony uses irrational violence against his top commanders. The answer to Kony’s legitimacy as a leader lies not with military background, but with the spirits. The top commanders believe that Kony has spirits possess him, and speak through him, and this is what makes them deferential to Kony. The spirits give Kony his legitimacy as a leader. However, the spirits do not give him authority, only control. It serves the top commanders to view him as spirit medium because it justifies their own actions, and for the lower level commanders, the spirits serve as a control mechanism to prevent them from leaving. The belief in the spirits do not inspire loyalty or commitment as they would to a charismatic leader.

### **9.3.1. *Kony the Messiah versus Kony the Enigma***

Kony’s alleged spiritual abilities are not communicated to the entire LRA. The top commanders do know, and this serves to legitimise Kony and his leadership in their eyes.

Those close to Kony not only see him as a spirit medium, but also as religious messiah. Some even compared him to Jesus. His former medic,

Susan, worked under the assumption that Kony may indeed have been sent by God, and compared his treatment to that of Jesus:

Susan: Even Jesus, when he was walking in Jerusalem, the Israelites, they didn't know that this is Jesus, son of God. They took him, like another human being, and they killed him. And what he was doing, people did not know, yet he was sent by God. So, if Kony is also sent by God, as he claims, then it is up to him, he also one day one time be blessed, but if it is not that he came by himself and started doing all those atrocities alone, then God will judge him, because he is telling us that he is sent by God, and the spirit from God, that is really him talking to him. Let's first wait and see what will happen.

Samuel, a former top commander, was less reticent in his comparisons of Kony to Jesus.

Samuel: He [Kony] is waiting for the time to come, or as he may be, he will be killed, and then Kony will come back home then, like Jesus, as Jesus was called from Egypt. That person he was killing from your land is now dead, you go back home now. So Jesus was taken back home.

Samuel was referring to the events narrated in the Gospel of Matthew (2:13-23) where Jesus' parents were forced to flee with the infant Jesus to Egypt to escape King Herod's infanticide. This illustrates how the Bible – something that is a central feature to traditional civilian life – is used to legitimise a brutal and incessant rebellion. But to those who are not close to Kony, he is an enigma, whom they must blindly follow. Both Grace and Michael report that they felt unable to question him, for fear that he would have them killed.

Grace: He doesn't say anything about the killing. And we cannot even ask him why he is doing that, because first of all we also fear him, he is the big man, and sometimes, for example, if you see a snake, can you really go and ask a snake, or go and talk to snake? You cannot. So, you just fear because he can also kill you.

Grace was afraid of Kony, and so did not question him. Michael, too, feared Kony, however, it is because he thought that Kony knew if you were going to ask him something.

Michael: Joseph Kony is a very funny man. On several occasions that we sat together, we stayed together, we even walked together. But you cannot advise him, you cannot tell him what to do. Because first of all before you come up with an idea, like why don't we go back home, why are we fighting, he will know all of those things. So what you are asking, he already knows. So if you ask him, it can be a different thing altogether. He can even kill you. So we cannot advise me, and for me, I would not even advise Kony in any way, I would not even try. But I was respecting him, because he is a wise man.

Kony's spiritual powers are less important for the lower commanders because his authority is not in question. They fear him more than he has to fear them.

### **9.3.2. *Kony the Sex Pest***

For a man who is widely believed to have spirits speak through him, who can predict the future, and see into the minds of his forced recruits, his former forced wife, Florence, presented a very different side to this man: a man who takes young women he finds attractive, without their consent and forces them into subjugation to fulfil his sexual appetite. She told me how she came to be Kony's 'wife':

Florence: Kony used to come and pay a visit to [Kenneth] Banya, they stay together. Maybe he felt, I don't know, some admiration, because by then I was still young, and had that beauty. So he ordered that I should be taken to his home. I went, and that is how I became his wife. I stayed with him until 2001, when I produce a kid with him, and it was until that time that I came back home.

She went on to describe Kony's carnal activity with the harem of women he keeps as his 'wives':

Florence: Kony has over three hundred women. And he could make his home just like a camp, and his house were to be in the centre, whereby if he to sleep with one, bring you to sleep with him. Unless, too many women. So, sometimes, Kony cannot even sleep, because he's always [having sex]. It is just too much. So, I myself, he slept with me just once, and I don't know if it is the spirit that makes him to realise or not, that if I do these things with the woman, this will produce a kid. But

luckily, Kony has no AIDS, and when I talk, I tested several times, and I'm free...Kony is a very strong man, sexually. Because he can sleep with four women a night, and a go of two rounds. So he can sleep with you, then tell you to call your friend, for example, call Ivory to come, I will sleep with her. So that's how Kony is....He did it several times, and it came to the point where he was so tired, because every time, every time, that he could take just one evening, one woman, and then the next one, like that.

It's astounding that he has the energy to maintain a rebellion. I asked Samuel more about Kony and his plethora of forced wives, and he explained that Kony was a 'very stiff man'.

Interviewer: How many wives does Kony have?

Samuel: When I left, he was having 27, and a school of children.

Interviewer: And they all stay with him?

Samuel: He was teaching us also how to stay with women, that we are like animals, you are to wait for the period, then you sleep with a woman, and when the women get pregnant you leave the women, like the animal do.

Interviewer: And you get another women pregnant?

Samuel: Yes! For me, I have six children, using that system...we are animals, we are to use that system. That is why we are failing, because people do not want to use that system. That system is very good.

Interviewer: But it means that men have a lot children with different women?

Samuel: When you use that system, even 100 women, you stay with that, and they all have children. You wait for the period. And when they have given pregnant to this one, another one comes, you fire, another one comes. You can stay with many women. That one was used by Solomon also. You know the story of him? Old Testament.

It is not hard to understand that this is appealing to the top commanders. They were offered as many women as they want, and told that this is not wrong; in fact, it is in the Bible. They are able to justify impregnating multiple women, without their consent, through these religious edicts. Having a spiritual leader is working to their advantage, as they are able to rationalise their acts by appealing to religion. International law, however, does not. Rape and sexual slavery are



considered both crimes against humanity and war crimes under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (Article 7, 1(g); Article 8, 2(e)(vi)). Joseph Kony has been indicted for both offences, as was his late deputy, Vincent Otti (ICC, 2005), but this does not seem to deter the commanders from advocating a system that no doubt facilitated these ICC charges. Despite the commanders' fears over the ICC, they did not seem to recognise that these too were crimes, and even laughed when I brought it up.

Nyanzi et al. (2009) report that in Uganda, manhood is determined by sexual partners and that having multiple women is viewed as a sign of being a 'real man'. Polygamy is institutionalised in Uganda, and having, supporting and reproducing with more than one wife is viewed as a symbol of masculinity. Thus, by having many women, these commanders are reflecting a culturally held value, and this may be something that is not available to them in civilian life, as marriage and even the maintenance of stable sexual partnerships is determined by a man's ability to provide financially for the women (Nyanzi et al., 2004). The difference is that in the bush, the commanders do not have the consent of the women they take as their 'wives'. Nevertheless, Kony is offering these men a culturally respected union in a manner acceptable to them and permits them to achieve manhood, which they cannot get if the women were raped, and not their 'wives'.

In Liberia, Utas (2005) also reported that rebel commanders would have multiple girlfriends because they saw it as a sign of status. Utas (2005) points out that these rebel commanders were the rural poor, who witness the 'strongmen' of their home village have multiple women, and this is what they sought to emulate, although the urban elite did not hold the view that many women equated to status. The women, for their part, chose to align themselves with these rebel commanders, because it offered them security and protection. Denov and Gervais (2007) report similar occurrences in the RUF, whereby girls would choose to enter a bush 'marriage' with a commander because of the relative protection, and sometime status, it would afford her.

### **9.3.3. Kony the Prophet**

According to Allen (1991), Alice Lakwena differed from most spirit mediums in Acholi society, because she claimed to be a *nebi*, or prophet. Kony too claims that as a spirit medium he is able to predict the future, and herein lies the real power of the spirits to the LRA:

Susan: Kony said do you know what will happen? There is going to be a serious war. All the world will join their hand to fight us, to fight we here. But they will not defeat us. All the ammunitions they will use to destroy us, the bombs to destroy us, will be closed. It will not work. They will come and try us, but will fail. America will be in command, and all, they will fail. That is what you have got to know, that will happen. Kony even said, if he has ears, you listen to it, if I have the brain, then mark it, because there is going to be a very serious war, but it will not be the end of us, or the end of me, Kony, because I haven't yet completed the deal that God has sent me for. The mission God has sent me for I have not yet completed, and I will not go back yet. They will try their best, but none of them will succeed. He said, if Mzee Banya, there will be a time when Mzee Banya will go back home, to Uganda government, to go home and stay with them, because I can pick, or I can give you one hundred soldiers, or brigades, but still they will not be a position of keeping Mzee Banya, he will still go back home. So if the time of him to go home has come, leave him to go, nobody should bother. Because I myself will not do anything. Kony said that his first wife, the first lady, will come back home and die with all the children before they were sent together. And the second wife will still come back to Uganda, and go back to him, and stay with him. He said these things earlier enough, and all those things happened. The first wife came and died, with all the children, as he said when we were in the bush. Died from the bush. With all the children. And the second lady, during the time of peace talk, she went back in the bush, and she still with Kony. So I see all what was saying is coming true.

Susan saw everything that Kony had predicted come into fruition, which led her to believe that he is a prophet. Edward made similar comments about Kony's prophetic abilities, but he is more circumspect, and expressed that Kony was dangerous, which could demonstrate that Edward feared him, just like the other commanders did.

Edward: Kony is like a chameleon. Its good now, but after thirty minutes, he's dangerous again. Because he told us the war will not pass. If the war cannot pass, then how can you

take over Uganda? And the spirits said that the war will not take, what, pass the [inaudible] and then they said, some people will stay in another land, and they will multiply there, like Israel multiply there, what, in Egypt. Then that nation will ask, where did these people come from, who are many, said these people came during Kony's war. And we except some of the Acholi will now stay in Congo, or in Central Africa. They will not come back. That is what he said. Those who will die, who are meant to die in Sudan will die, those who will come home will come home. Some will become very rich. He just prophecies many things, and we have seen many things happen. He said people will understand that the war is over, but [inaudible]. So after ten years, it has been eight years now [since he came out], people will know that the war is over, Kony is not coming, there is already peace. But for him, spirit told him he will not come to light. And he called it light also. He said, you people will go to light, but for me, I will stay in darkness, until when people will just remember that we are, Kony is not there, there is already peace. They will still be hiding, after ten years, that is when they will come.

#### **9.3.4. Predictions**

For the top commanders, Kony's predictions are not a reason to worry – probably because Kony predicted that the top commanders would return home safely. Samuel explained he was not afraid thanks to Kony's predictions:

Samuel: Even in the bush, Kony prophesied that so many commanders will leave here, they will go back home. Including me, including [Kenneth] Banya. So, a moment you are coming back home, you will not be worried, because you are revealing that one, that at such and such a time, Kony told us that we are going back home. So this is the time for me to go back home. So we were not fearing.

Arthur also told me that Kony would foresee things that would come true, like the war in the Congo. He also predicted that the peace talks in 2006 would collapse because the government would not offer him a position in the government. He also knew when the soldiers were coming. More bizarrely, Samuel reported another of Kony's predictions:

Samuel: He predicted that all people in the world will be circumcised...I have seen now, people have started being circumcised. You know, what he predicted doesn't happen at this time. It may take time.

There has been (and still is) a drive over the past few years in Uganda promoting circumcision in order to reduce the transmission of HIV. Samuel saw this as evidence of Kony's prophetic powers. However, Kony's ability to predict is designed to instil fear into the lower ranking soldiers. They believe his powers of prediction mean that he would know if they want to escape, which intimidated them into staying:

Esther: They told us that if you want to escape, for him, he can just know. He can just know that this person is thinking this and this, and we were having that fear. That he can know what is on your brain, what you are thinking.

Esther did not explain why she believed this, just that she was afraid because she did believe it. Michael, however, had experience of Kony's apparent ability to know when someone was going to escape, and he witnessed Kony's response:

Michael: Another example is that we had another general, called Anware. Anware wanted to escape away with his wife. He thought of it, but has never told the wife yet, that maybe I need to escape with my wife and go back home. So before taking any step, Kony knew that, so he called people, after gathering people, he order Anware to be killed. Because Anware want to leave with the wife. So this man is very hard, even do anything, just do it abruptly, without thinking, if everyone who is leaving from the bush, Kony know, unless maybe he does not know you. If you plan to escape, he will know. So that's what normally people do, they just escape maybe during fighting, ambush time, maybe like when they have gone to pick things form the garden, maybe escape from there...As I said, it is was very difficult to escape, because you need not to plan.

Grace had seen Kony being told by the spirits of illicit sexual relations in the group, which, likewise, resulted in the transgressors' execution.

Grace: Kony is very, very very funny. He can even tell you ahead of time that in such and such period of time, that such a thing will happen. For example, for if I am going to have sex with Mr. Court, Kony will know, they will tell him ahead of time... Those girls were killed because of getting out, leaving your man, going to another man. They were killed. For example, a Madi girl called Anna, one day one time, they were taken in front to guard the battalion, so from there, they started giving sex, of

which, from the bush we used to call *abore*, that is sin. So, they were shot for the sinful act they were doing, and Kony is funny. If you are doing such things, the spirit will tell him that such and such somewhere with Mr so-and so is doing this, so for that matter they were brought in front and shot, because of that act.

It is not just Kony's perceived abilities to read people's minds or know the future that strikes fear within his soldiers, but also the consequences, which is death. The fact Grace told me about Kony knowing about affairs, while Michael and Esther talked about Kony knowing when people were planning to escape perhaps demonstrates the differing concerns that these participants had in relation to Kony's prophetic powers.

Two of the lower ranking commanders told me about what led to Kony's deputy, Vincent Otti, being executed:

George: When you are talking to him [Kony], he knows, he predicts what you may be thinking of. If you want really to kill him, he will know. If anything that you want to do, he will know. That's why, he also went and killed Otti, his general, because the man wanted to change his mind, and to start his own rebel, to fight, and overthrow the government. So he killed him, because he knew what was in this guy's mind.

Michael told me the same thing:

Michael: He has spirits in him. Because even Otti Vincent was killed, Kony killed him, because Otti Vincent had a different idea, and he knew before, so he decided to kill.

They both believed that Kony knew that Otti planned to defect because the spirits had told him. Kony's top commanders, however, told me another story about how Kony found out about Otti's plan:

Samuel: Otti was having a plan of leaving him. So he knew it.

Interview: The spirits told him?

Samuel: No. You know, he used for – he talked to people, and when you are a commander, you are given an escort. That escort is intelligence, to see your behaviour, what are you doing, are you talking?

Interviewer: So you get spied on?

Samuel: Yes. That is how he got Otti.

This appears a far more rational explanation for Kony's ability to know what is going on, rather than spiritual intervention. It is interesting that the top commanders, the ones who fully subscribe to the spirits, know the real reason for Vincent Otti's deception being revealed. This illustrates that the spirits worked as a control mechanism for the lower ranking recruits, those not in the inner circle, and so they believe that Kony can predict and know when someone is going to betray him or try to leave the LRA. It serves to prevent them from leaving.

### **9.3.5. *Blame the Spirits***

The spirits conveniently ensure that Joseph Kony is absolved of responsibility for what 'they' have ordered him to do. But spirits are deemed to be either good or bad, and bad decisions are attributed to a 'bad spirit'. Not only do the appeal to the spirits make the subsequent actions unaccountable, but undesirable actions are then put down to a different type of spirits. This justifies the belief in the spirits in the face of undesirable or bad actions that result from the spirits. Edward, who was 'saved' and became a born again Christian when he left the bush, told me about these two types of spirits, explaining that he knows about spirits because he has become born again:

Edward: And you know, I join the born again [Christians], I know now the spirit. But there are two types, the evil ones, and good ones.

Interviewer: Which one speaks to Kony?

Edward: The wrong one. It is the wrong one. But they have the capabilities. They can only go away by, when you pray, God will send. But otherwise, spirits are there. Those who kill, they are having evil spirit. When the spirit remove them, they become good people.

Interviewer: Is that why the LRA has killed a lot of people?

Edward: Yeah, because of the bad spirit. The spirit will – certain like sucking, what, blood, certain, will want people to suffer, always to suffer. To suffer. To disagree with everyone, one another. But good spirit want what, to love one another. And to fear to kill. The good spirit forgives instead of destruction.

Charles reveals that it is Kony himself who had told them that there are both good and bad spirits:

Charles: Even he told us that, he's having spirits, so he never know that if it is good spirit or a bad spirit, but he know that there's a spirit on him. That's what he told us.

Interviewer: So sometimes the bad spirit speaks through him?

Charles: Yes.

But the commanders are unable to determine which spirits are good or bad, which means that decisions that have undesirable consequences can be attributed to a bad spirit after the fact, absolving Kony of any responsibility for bad decisions, and protecting the belief in the spirits when things do not go well for the LRA.

Samuel: Spirits to speak to people, but you cannot judge whether it is a bad spirit or a good spirit. The bad spirit can also use the word of Jesus Christ, who said there are some hyena who sometimes wear the skin of lamb. Some bad spirit can use that system, to lure people. So it is very difficult to judge. Unless you see, as he says, if it is a bad spirit, it is going to end. But if it is a good spirit, it is going to stay now. That's what he said. Because we are asking, how do we know that it is a good spirit? His answer was the bad spirits do not last, but the good spirits last longer. That's what he said, he told us. So people should judge him by staying, is he going to stay long, but he has lasted now.

Susan specifically stated that she did not believe Kony was responsible for the acts committed by his soldiers, through his commands, because of the spirits. Therefore Kony – deemed to be the most responsible for the actions of the LRA, as their leader – is not culpable, and in Susan's eyes, should not be tried by the ICC:

Susan: Kony does not want people to kill, but it is the spirit that comes in him that can tell him to really give the message that people should be killed. And I really feel that Kony should not be taken for trial, because when he's free without nothing in him, Kony behave like a very normal human being, and he talks senses, and he do good things, but when that thing comes, Kony will kill.

### **9.3.6. Convert versus Control – why only the top commanders need to believe**

The LRA manipulates two familiar institutions in Acholi society: spirits and the Bible. These have no doubt taken on greater importance given the deprivation the region has suffered as a result of the war. Both the top commanders and the lower ranking soldiers are controlled by the belief in the spirits, but the spirits serve very different purposes. For the lower commanders, the spirits are a means of internal control, whereby the belief in Kony's prophetic and mind reading abilities effectively prevent them from trying to escape. But the top commanders fully subscribe to the belief in the spirits, and Kony's power as a prophet, not just in terms of predicting escapes, but knowing the future.

It is possible that only the top commanders believe in Kony's power because a group needs a dense network to transmit their ideology (Papachristos, 2009), whereas rebel groups that engage in guerrilla warfare are by nature decentralised and sparse. But Kony is only seen as a spirit medium and a prophet by his top commanders. They are the ones that represent the most threat to his authority, and were the most important to maintain his position. The core top commanders matter and need to believe in the spiritual aspect of the LRA. Kony does not need all the recruits to be loyal to him, or believe in him – just his top commanders. The recruits just have to be loyal to their immediate commander, who in turn needs to be loyal to his commander, all the way to the top. So it does not matter if the lower recruits believe in Kony's charismatic authority. Richard described the chain of loyalty within the LRA:

Richard: So now if you are a soldier, you command people, you put people who are loyal to you next to you. So that now, when there is a deployment like there is a group of people in Uganda, and there is a group of people in Sudan there is a group of people somewhere, there are bosses aiding these people, these are bosses that are loyal to you. And as well, as they are loyal to you, the people under what, under him are loyal to him. You get the point. They are loyal to him. So now, whatever you communicate from here, goes up to the what, to the ground level. That's how he controls what, the big number of soldiers, without payment. That is how he does his thing. So he keeps people loyal to him, the soldiers, the commanders who are next to him are loyal to him. The commanders under those next to



him are loyal to the commanders, those superiors. And the channel just flows like that. So in the end, you find you at all loyal to the same person.

As Richard explained, lower recruits are not directly loyal to Kony, just to their immediate superior, but the chain of command in the military hierarchy, with Kony at the top, means that all recruits are ultimately loyal to him. In the same way, only the top commanders need to believe in the spiritual aspects of the LRA, as they are the ones who are directly loyal to Kony. For the lower ranking commanders, the spirits are just another means of internal control, a way to encourage them that leaving is not in their best interests. Unlike the threat of violence, the belief in divine punishment for not following the rules, and Kony's ability to read their minds plays on well-established Biblical teachings and normative structures within Acholi society, and makes them responsible for their own fate. The impact of Kony's mind reading skills was much like Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon prison, whereby the prisoners knew they could be watched by the guards, but could not verify when they were in fact being watched, and so came to police their own behaviour as if they were always being watched (Bentham, 1962 [1838]). Likewise, the lower commanders could not verify if and when Kony was 'reading their minds' but believed it was possible, so they did not think of leaving, thus placing an effective control on their actions.

However, controlling forced recruits in order to make them stay does not create loyalty. People will obey because they are scared not to. But many forced recruits – including nineteen of my participants – did not just obey because they had to; they attained rank, and became commanders, perpetrating the same acts that they had been subject to when they were forced to join. These commanders had in fact formed allegiances within the LRA and to the LRA itself. They wanted to gain rank, because it gave them power over their inferiors and respect from their superiors. Allegiance is an equally important factor in turning forced recruits into rebels.

## 10. Allegiance

Violence and the spiritual aspects of the LRA both serve as highly effective means of internal control for forced recruits. A climate of fear is generated through the constant threat of being killed and the perception of having their every move or thought known, but people are not blindly obeying to avoid death. All but one of my participants received a rank during their time in the LRA, and had actively participated to achieve this rank. They were exhibiting not just blind obedience, but compliance, and, ultimately allegiance. While some research acknowledges that forced recruits can come to develop some loyalty towards the group (for example, Annan et al., 2006), but there are few explanations as to why. Gates (2011) stated that it is the process of socialisation that creates a sense of allegiance to a rebel group, but he was specifically looking at child soldiers. While many of my participants were teenagers when recruited, at least seven were not<sup>23</sup>, and yet all of my participants stayed with the group and demonstrated some allegiance by actively advancing within the group. My only participant who did not receive a rank, Patience, still lives with her LRA 'husband' and continued to have his children after they had left the bush, which I interpreted as a form of allegiance, because she has accepted the man she was forced to marry, and hence has accepted the LRA's version of 'marriage'.

Allegiance is not just to the LRA, but to each other, the people who make up the LRA. What I observed was the bond between the former rebels. James had been Samuel's immediate superior, and it was Samuel who convinced James to talk to me. Charles would sit with James in the garden of the Establishment. Samuel and Edward hugged and seemed very close, and it struck me how these top commanders are still friends. It was not just the top commanders who built

<sup>23</sup> Births are often not registered, and some participants did not know their exact age as a result.

lasting relationships. Of my other participants I witnessed at the Establishment, Florence greeted Susan. Patience seemed to know Florence, and Patience was still with her bush husband. I did not unravel the basis for these relationships, or whether they had been formed in the bush, or out here, in Gulu, but what was apparent was that they still had an affinity and that there was no bitterness or resentment. It has been reported that within the reception centres, returnees often recreate the power structures that existed in the LRA, with higher ranking members still exerting control over people who were under their command as rebels (Allen and Schomerus, 2006), but this is not what was going on at the Establishment. They seem to be genuine friendships. There is clearly still allegiance to one another even though they are out of the group.

But friendships alone are not enough to persuade forced recruits to stay and participate in a rebel group. Little research has addressed what they actually gain from being part of the LRA. Branch (2011) points out that many abductees actively choose to remain with the rebels, because their rights are better realised than if they were to leave. I found that recruits consciously come to the conclusion that resistance and escape are hopeless and actively decide to stay and participate. This decision leads to better treatment within the group. They come to want rank, because of their beliefs in the goals of the LRA and the positive affirmation they receive. Getting rank, in turn, makes recruits feel more as if they are part of the LRA, and come as a result of commitment to the group and compliance with orders.

Those who give the ranks related the qualities that leads to ranks being bestowed, including showing initiative, being 'strong hearted', which means having courage and being a good fighter, killing during battle, and having knowledge that is of use to the LRA, such as knowing the local area. In short, recruits who demonstrate that they are good soldiers are promoted, which is not unlike traditional promotion in government armies. In turn, the benefits of getting rank are both material, in terms of getting better food, and being given a forced 'wife', but also, and no less important, are the respect and power that come with being a 'small boss'. This is crucial to the significance of rank because it allows rebels to achieve culturally defined notions of manhood. The Acholi were

traditionally recruited into the military services during colonial rule, and prior to Museveni's victory in 1986, the armed forces were predominately of a northern composition (Cheney, 2005; Kasozi, 1994). As the Acholi, and other northern tribes were excluded from political life and were economically less advantaged than the south, so the military became the principal means for men to gain power and respect. This was especially true after independence, when the military became the "ultimate arbitrator of power" (Setfel, 1994, p.255). But after 1986 when Museveni took power and southerners began to take military positions, and the north became blighted by civil war, Acholi men were not able to attain these of attributes of masculinity, which was strongly linked to being a warrior (Anderson, 2009; Ocaya-Lakidi, 1977). War "put manliness to the test by questioning the individual's physique, courage and the ability to secure victory from the enemy. The more manly, the more warrior-like" (Ocaya-Lakidi, 1977, p.152). A rebel group is fundamentally an army, and allows men to become soldiers, and to gain power and respect, as they had done in the government army before the UNLA defeat. It is not a surprise, then, that many former rebels choose to join the government army after they have left the LRA. An entire battalion of the UPDF was made up solely of former LRA combatants, although it has since been disbanded (Allen and Schomerus, 2006; Borzello, 2007).

No less important to the discussion of allegiance are the reasons for which the participants desert from the LRA. Despite the desire and ability to get ranks, all my participants, by virtues of being accessible to me, had left the bush. While the top commanders had been rescued/captured by the UPDF (depending on whose version to believe), the lower ranking commanders had all left of their own volition. Leaving usually occurs through chance, when an opportunity presents itself, often in the midst of battle, and is not the result of careful planning. But recruits often have had opportunities to escape long before they actually choose to take them. Their reasons for ultimately deserting are a complex mix of reasons to stay, not to leave, not to stay and reasons to leave, and are not as straight forward as often portrayed in previous research.

## 10.1. Women Fighters

There is not a clear picture on how many women have been recruited into the LRA. Data from eight reception centres in northern Uganda estimate that 24% of the returnees were females (Pham, Vinck and Stover, 2007), while a UNICEF (2001) survey estimated that 30% of 28,903 people recorded as having been abducted between 1990 and 2001 from Gulu, Kitgum, Pader, Apac and Lira districts were women. Therefore, around a quarter of the LRA's fighting force were female. There exists little research on why armed groups recruit women (Cohen, 2013), and there is the general assumption that when they are recruited, they are there to feed, clean or service the male soldiers. However, a militia could not function effectively if they excluded a quarter of their members from battle. Women were abducted, as one former commander told me, to be soldiers. They were involved in fighting like the men, and, like men, would achieve rank if they excelled on the battlefield.

Gender assumptions mean that women are not expected to participate in wartime violence (Cohen, 2013), because stereotypes define women as maternal, nurturing and caring – characteristics that are at odds with soldiering (Bloom, 2011; Goldstein, 2001). This is why women are not presented as fighters within the LRA literature, but from what I was told, all females who were recruited were expected to fight, and those who did not or could not would be killed, the same as the men. For women who became commanders, it permits them access to the status of men in a patriarchal society from which they would otherwise be excluded.

This role as soldiers did not negate nor usurp their traditional gender role, as a wife and mother. All the women that I spoke to – regardless of their rank – had been forced 'wives'. If and when they got pregnant as a result of these unions, they were excused from fighting: pregnancy is a respected status. This did, however, get in the way of their ability to advance, my participants told me, and perhaps this helps to explain why women did not excel as far as they might have. Nevertheless, women did not reject their traditional gender roles when they became soldiers, nor when they began to enter the masculine world of command.

## 10.2. “There was no way out”: Staying

The excessive violence that other research has stated occurs at the time of abduction could well lead to the assumption that allegiance is a form of trauma bonding. The reality is far more banal. Initially after abduction, some participants related a mental shift from wanting to leave, to deciding to participate. Grace, who reached the rank of lieutenant, the highest ranking woman that I talked to, told me that when she recognised that there was no way for her to leave the group she started to embrace the fighting:

Grace: There was no way out, for any of us, without killing and shooting with guns. So what I did, I really prayed, and I got my gun, and said, God, if I am to die, I will die, if I will still be alive, I will fight and still go back home. Because I had no option, so I starting facing the fighting.

Notably, Grace was choosing to take an active role, to participate in the fighting. She does not present herself as helpless, or a victim. William, a low ranking commander, too recognised the futility of trying to escape, and the relative benefits of staying:

William: So, if they, if you try to escape, they kill you, there and then. So, like me, I was fearing to be killed. So I said, let me also survive with these people. Then I got, they give me some, I finish like 3 months, it is now, this man is working with us, they leave me free. Doing what they like, then they say, he's a good boy... I did not try to escape anymore, then I was just listening to what they tell me. Because there was a boy who was also there, he told me what was taking place when he was there. So for him, he was telling me if you agree with what they tell you, you get a way of surviving, then they will not do anything on you. You will just be free, food you will get, for even me when I get tired, because I am short, they can get someone to carry me. I just be free.

Biderman (1957) found that prisoners of war came to comply with their captors because their captors successfully undermined resistance, using threats, isolation, food and sleep deprivation and the occasional positive reinforcement or reward. The tactics that bring about compliance are to do with self-interest and

survival. William decided to comply because of his fear of being killed if he does not, and the meagre rewards if he does.

William also reported getting advice from another abductee on what to do and how to survive, and this demonstrates the importance of friendship and bonds that formed between members of the LRA. This no doubt helped to create a loyalty to other members and thus to the group as a whole. Michael elaborated on this mentoring within the LRA, with recruits who had been with the group for a time taking new recruits under their wing, and teaching them the way of life, but also monitoring their actions.

Michael: When you are first abducted, you will be taken to some smaller, smaller groups, you will be grouped accordingly. If you are abducted today, you will get somebody who might have been abducted one week ago, so he might have been there and he knows how respect should be given. And that person will be given to him, to train you, to teach you how to really respect each other. So every section, every coy [group], there is a leader that reigns, and keeps on ask whoever has an idea of escaping, keeps on asking. So if such a case of escape exist, it will be reported to the boss, and the boss will again and talk to the very people. And respect – if you are abducted, like today, you will be given one week to be judged if truly things are going the way they are supposed to be. So, that is how in the bush respect is given.

Recruits choose to comply, out of a survival instinct, but the shared experiences they have with people who had been abducted before them helps them to create bonds to other members of the LRA, and, by extension, start to form a bond to the LRA itself. This is contrary to research on other groups – for example, in the RUF, Denov and Maclure (2009) report that recruits would forge bonds to one another as a means of resistance to the RUF.

### **10.3. “They are fighting for cars and good houses”: Aspiring to Rise**

My participants uniformly reported that they wanted to get promoted within the LRA. While prior research suggests that any desire for rank came from the

benefits of rank, such as resources and women (Annan et al., 2008; Vermeji, 2011), I found that the material benefits of rank were not a motivation for getting rank. Instead, motivation comes from beliefs in the goals of rebellion, specifically to overthrow the government, and the subsequent role that they would get to play in the new, Kony-led government. The affirmation they get for doing well in battle and earning a rank also leads to a desire advance further.

### **10.3.1. *Belief in the Goals***

Only the top commanders believe that the goal of the LRA rebellion is to impose the Ten Commandments on Uganda, and, apparently, the rest of the world. The remaining participants believed that they were fighting to overthrow the Ugandan government. Grace, a lieutenant, relates that this made her want to be a commander:

Grace: Earlier on, I was really driven up to do anything that made me a good commander, because I was seeing, coming to Uganda, that it was going to be something big.

Colin, who eventually made it to the high command, told me that initially he was motivated by the promise of future rewards he would get when the rebellion was successful, such as a big position and a house of his choosing:

Colin: I should really use that gun, I am now a trained soldier, I should start fighting, because whenever we overthrow the government, I shall have a very big position.... Even policy say by then, if you are a soldier, you are born to die, and anytime you can die, you have got to work for your dearest life. And if we are to overthrow the government, I will have the freedom of meeting the house I want to live in, any position I will get, what to eat, and I have places to take anything in this world and live the way I want, so can easily change. So can easily change young minds, even we mature men minds. So they were even telling people that, you see government has organised with the Karamojong,<sup>24</sup> they have taken Acholi's cattle, Acholi's wealth, people really rely on it. So now, the government want to take Acholi land again, so if you go back, you mature people, they

<sup>24</sup> The Karamojong are a north-eastern tribe that has a history of raiding cattle from the Acholi.



will kill you softly, so I had to take you to work and fight for the betterment of you.

The reference to grievances of the Acholi people against the government and a neighbouring tribe, the Karamojong, also serve as a motive. Edward, a top commander, also explained that abductees fight for the material things that they believe they will get, because that is what they are promised:

Edward: So that is how the children are brainwashed, and they tell them that you are minister, you will get houses, so children now aim for houses, drive cars, you see? So they are fighting for cars and good houses.

Given the impact of the war on Acholiland, ravaging an already impoverished area, and the displacement of about 90% of the population into Internal Displacement Camps, it is not hard to see that the promise of houses, food, and jobs is enticing. These are aspirations most abductees could not hope to attain in civilian life, especially given the disruption to education<sup>25</sup>, and the inability of many families to pay school fees<sup>26</sup>. The rewards they hoped to gain from the rebellion are not extreme; they are socially valued goals, such as a house or a job, but typically unavailable to them through legitimate avenues. So while they may not have joined willingly, the LRA offers them the apparition of a future that neither civilian life, nor the government, could help them achieve.

### **10.3.2. Affirmation**

Getting a rank is an achievement within the LRA. Advancement is usually based upon the recommendation of a superior, and often done in public. Many of my participants reported getting their rank from Joseph Kony himself. This serves as a strong positive reinforcement and motivates recruits to want to get further

<sup>25</sup> The literacy rate in Gulu in 2007, for example, was 56%, compared to 70% in Uganda as a whole (Kelly and Odama, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> The average annual income per capita in Gulu in 2007 was 183,600 UGX (about US\$104 at the time), compared to the national average of 570,000 UGX (about US\$322 at the time) (Kelly and Odama, 2011).

ranks. Richard, who eventually became a corporal, reported with pride how he got his first rank:

Richard: It was a captain. You know, rank, you are not given just anyhow. So when we finish that attack, we went back, and I was recommended, by that captain. He was the captain leading us. So I was recommended by the captain, and the information reached up to the what, that big man. And he say ah it's okay, he has done a tremendous work, we have to award him with some ranks. When I was given that rank, it was given by the head of the Lord's Resistance Army. Joseph Kony.

Being recognised for 'tremendous work', not just by his commanding officer, but by the head of the LRA himself affirmed his achievement. Thomas, who worked his way up to the rank of lieutenant, reported public praise and endorsement he received when he got his first rank.

Thomas: The commander asked them, and we explained how we managed to escape, how we managed to kill the guy who almost finished them, and how we manage to ensure that no one was there in that barracks. And from there, we called all the soldiers, and we were called in front and introduced to all the squad, that these people are now real and truly soldiers that must be honoured, and we want all of you to emulate them... To emulate them and be brave like them, and worked very hard. And because of this, we are now fully fledged combatants, and from the rank of private, we were... The first rank that we were supposed to get was lance Cpl, one 'V', so we were given... I was given two 'V's, and that was my first rank and given responsibility of ensuring that when they are cooking, when they are cooking, there is no smoke.

Rank appears to be given in public, in front of other recruits, which serves to enhance their reputation amongst their peers. Prior research on masculinity defines reputation as "the honour accrued to a man as a result of his 'masculine activities'" (Sui, Seeley and Wright, 2013, p.46), and an essential component is how a man is viewed by his peers (Wilson, 1969). Thus, by recognising their achievements publicly, the LRA affirms their masculinity in front of their peers. For women, aspiring to masculine qualities allowed them to be treated as equals in the LRA.

Andrew, who did not want the interview recorded, told me that he reached the level of second lieutenant. He was first promoted to the rank of senior private, then to lance corporal, then to sergeant and finally to the rank of second lieutenant. He got his first promotion after six months, and it was Joseph Kony who promoted him.

Rank and allegiance are reciprocal, whereby rank is given because of demonstrable allegiance, and getting rank creates allegiance. Miriam, who received the rank of second lieutenant, reported that receiving her rank made her feel like she was more part of the rebel group:

Interviewer: So did getting a rank make you feel like you were more part of the LRA?

Miriam: Yes, because it makes you strong hearted, and when alone in fighting, you fight bravely knowing that if I'm really to finish this level, I'll go to the next level, I'll get more rank. And if I'm to get more rank, and fight, and overthrow the government, I'll get a big position, because I'm already a boss, so maybe that can carry courage to fight.

Interviewer: So did you want to get another rank than?

Miriam: Yes, I wanted.

Interviewer: So did you try and get one?

Miriam: Yes, I tried, but pregnancy and abduction came and caught me on my way, so I now could – I started staying where women were, and I had little time to stay with those lieutenants until when I left.

Florence also reported that she had hoped to get a higher rank, and even regretted not joining the Ugandan army when she left the LRA, as that would have given her the opportunity to continue to advance within the military.

Florence: I was given second-lieutenant by Kony himself. I had a uniform, walk, just like that. Anyway, I got that during the hardest time, when things were not very fine. We were shot all the time, and fighting was happening. We were three, women with ranks. I wish I knew, I would have joined the army [UPDF], I would have now have been adding to my rank.

The fact that Florence wished to join the UPDF to 'add' to her rank demonstrates that getting rank was in and of itself important – she is not

concerned with achieving rank specifically in the LRA, but clearly getting a rank in an army was a status to strive for. Grace, too, talked about being inspired to get her rank:

Grace: I stayed with LRA for fifteen years. I started getting my rank from Palataka, LRA base, in southern Sudan, because of the good heart and good relations I am having with my colleagues, that what inspired me to get that opportunity and get my rank, lieutenant.

It is interesting that Miriam, Florence and Grace all actively express desire to advance within the LRA, as they are all women, and the military is traditionally a male enterprise. Being a soldier is associated with characteristics of manliness, such as bravery and aggression, and in the same way that men wish to get ranks to prove their manhood, the women want to attain this masculine status in what is a traditionally patriarchal society. They talked about having courage and 'good heart', attributes of soldiers, and men. Miriam related that pregnancy stopped her from getting any further rank, which corresponds to the traditional gender roles in Acholi society, where women are wives and mothers, and men are the providers and protectors (Nyanzi et al., 2004).

#### **10.4. "I actually became somehow a small boss": Getting Rank**

According to the Survey of War Affected Youth (SWAY), 54% of recruits who stayed longer than six months in the LRA were given a rank (Annan, Blattman and Horton, 2006). I had in fact found it very difficult to find anyone who had served for more than six months and had not got a rank. This is not because ranks are given freely to people based on the length of time recruits have been with the LRA. Rather, ranks are achieved, through demonstrable compliance to the rules and norms of the group, and commitment to the group. Rank in other groups has been attributed to being aggressive, looting and abducting (Maclure and Denov, 2006), which also demonstrates compliance and commitment in fulfilling the aims of the group.

### **10.4.1. Compliance**

A rank is a reward for compliance. Recruits who obey and carry out the orders of their commanding officer, and do so successfully will be promoted, as Roger explained:

Roger: People normally want to get promoted, by doing the right thing, as the commander gives to them....the first rank, if they take you for any operation. If the commander sends you to carry out an operation somewhere, and you went and did it the way he actually commanded you, and you came back successfully with all, or some of the items, some of the, maybe the ammunition is, the guns, you'd be telling us someone who is courageous and who can work hard to promote them, and he'll be given a rank, or they will promote you.

Roger pointed out that recruits must actively comply, by working hard and being courageous, to be promoted. They have to demonstrate that they are good soldiers. Richard told me how he got his final rank, or corporal:

Richard: It took me around two years. Two years. That is when I got some rank in the army. Because for you to get a rank, you should do something they consider good in the army. Yeah, you should do something that is good, that is when you can get a rank. That was a corporal. They call it a what, corporal.

Interviewer: So what kind of thing do you have to do? Can that you give me an example?

Richard: it was in a battlefield, you know it was a very fierce fighting, between us and the government soldiers. So we went and attacked the barracks, it was not an easy fight, we started in the morning, fairly early at around 6 AM in the morning, then we overpowered them by midday. On our side around seven people died, and on the government side 14 – yeah, something, they died. So that fight, actually what I did that was so recommendable, I remember planting a landmine. Yeah? A landmine. They actually send me, because I was even very young, so they sent me to plant a landmine, so that when we attack from this side, as the soldiers will be running, they what, they will get landmines here. So now that these landmines, that we, I plant, I planted it in such a way that when they – you knows, where these big army officials always stay? And now to manoeuvre near where they are staying, it is not easy. You have to have a lot of tricks. And you know, being a soldier with some military gadgets could manoeuvre, and pass, and beat all these, the security, so that you can plan around their. It wasn't easy. But I did it, very smartly, I went back in the bush. I went

back among others, knowing well assured that when we attack now, these people what, [*makes exploding hand gesture*]. And that one, I think, two majors died. Majors and the soldiers. So that one was, I was the brains behind that one. So they say ah this one is a brilliant soldier, maybe we have to – that is how I got that rank.

Richard got his rank of corporal because he planted a landmine near government soldiers, which resulted in the deaths of two majors of the UPDF. He was ordered to plant the landmine, which, as he related it, was a dangerous and risky operation, but he succeeded. Michael more broadly related that he got the rank of second lieutenant because was successfully killing enemy soldiers and getting their guns:

Michael: Yes, I was lieutenant, I was second lieutenant. You know, in the bush, you are not trained fully, and ranks are not according qualification, ranks are given according to hard work, and by the number of people you have killed, and sometimes by the number of guns you have raided. So, I got mine through shooting and killing, and rescuing others.

Grace, too, killed and got guns, which showed her compliance to help the LRA:

Grace: So I could fight, I could kill, and still survive, for so many months, that's how the bosses saw, and said now I have got to be given some position. My first rank was second lieutenant. That one was when I fought very well, and killed, and got guns. Kony himself saw one and said, he made an announcement that all of us who did tremendous work should come and be leaders, guide people, have foot soldiers, and control them wherever we go, and we keep fighting and commanding. That's how I came into my first rank.

Compliance creates a commitment to the group, because by following the orders of the superior, and carrying out operations that benefit the group, such as killing or looting weapons, they are contributing to the success of the group.

#### **10.4.2. Commitment**

Grace finally got to be lieutenant because her 'good work' demonstrated her commitment to the group:

Grace: But because of that continuous good work I was doing, when we went back I only had in a message that I'm supposed to be confirmed lieutenant, so it was announced officially that I was to become lieutenant. Because I was with [Vincent] Otti, and all the good work I was doing, Otti was witnessing. So that is what made me become full lieutenant.

Commitment also means not trying to leave the group either, as Florence related:

Interviewer: How did you get given the rank?

Florence: We don't feel escape, and when you don't have [inaudible]. When you respect, when you can fight, you can also be given. Like in my case, I walk faster, I am very quick in my action.

Miriam told me that she got a rank by saving the life of a commander after a landmine exploded. Here, she was acting on her own initiative to save the commander; she had not been ordered to do so. This is not just compliance, but commitment:

Miriam: What happened to me, to get that rank, it was a day we had a serious fighting. We walking to go and get food, and my boss, my commander, was in front, and I was after him, next to him. So you know from Sudan, those Dinkas<sup>27</sup> used to plant mines, using these wires, such that if one person steps on this wire, seven mines will explode and everyone will die at once. So before we reach where that wire was planted, the mine, they had one mine plant, just that if you step on that, it's not far from the barracks, they will listen to that sound, that explosion, and they will quickly come, because they know that there is something bad happening. Because if one of them will know this where we have planted, so nothing will happen. So immediately, that mine explode, they come very fast, and started shooting us. So what I did, one of the commanders who was in charge, he was hit by mine, so he fell down...so I fought and killed so many of them, so I rescued him, otherwise they were going to come and take him. So they showed me, and said, ok, if you can fight and kill people and rescue people's lives... and when they are now going to give rank, my name is on that list.

<sup>27</sup> Dinka is a Sudanese tribe.

Chick and Mazrui (1970) state that the process of being in a armed group lead members to understand and accept their role: “soldiers become absorbed into the system of authority when...they recognise their place in the patterns of roles and functions within the social system, and learn to respect socially sanctioned frontiers of authority” (p.12). Having decided to comply, initially perhaps just to ensure their own survival, the recruits become part of the system of authority that exists within the hierarchal structure of an army, and begin to contribute to the function of the group.

## **10.5. “When you are strong hearted, they will give you the rank”: Advancing**

Prior research has suggested that promotion was given for skill and obedience (Annan, Blattman and Horton, 2006), as well as for killing (HRW, 2003). But that does not capture the full picture. People achieve rank if they are a good soldier, and that means having initiative, being a good fighter, having courage, killing the enemy and using knowledge that is helpful for the LRA.

### **10.5.1. Initiative of Abductees**

James, a top commander who became responsible for giving rank, discussed how he initially began his ascent within the LRA because he showed initiative during an ambush, not only guarding the food he was carrying, but also acquiring guns:

James: Getting a rank depends on the capability of an individual we headed into the ambush. So they started shooting us. So me, when I joined, we headed into the ambush. They started shooting us. I was carrying cassava<sup>28</sup> on my head, but I did not throw the cassava down. Instead, I took the gun, one's gun who had thrown down, I ran with it. So, you know, in the bush, when you are strong hearted, they will give you the rank. So, when the ambush finished, some of our group went and gathered themselves, I was still behind carrying, because I was carrying

<sup>28</sup> A root vegetable and a staple of the northern Ugandan diet.



someone's gun, including mine, so it was heavy, carrying even cassava on my head. So, I delayed a little bit. When I came, they asked me, because they thought I'd escaped already, they asked me what was I doing behind. I told them, I am carrying two guns, plus the cassava on my head, so that delayed me, and my chief was very happy, my boss was very happy. And they laughed, and they clapped their hands for me. So that is how I started getting my rank.

James had the opportunity to escape, but chose not to do so. Instead, he went back to the LRA. Of course, he told me the reason he did not escape was because, as the other top commanders claimed, his family had been threatened. But his narrative does not betray any desire to escape, and rather shows a certain amount of pride at his boss's delight in his feat. Thomas, a lieutenant, showed a similar initiative to participate in the LRA, when he decided he wanted to learn to use rocket propelled grenades.

Thomas: After that battle, the next days, me, I picked up an interest in using rocket propelled grenades, that is the RPG, because I developed that feeling to use it. Because I developed a feeling, they started training me for two weeks, when we have reached Kitgum. We were in Kitgum by then. They trained me for that two weeks, they gave me that RPG, to use it because they realise that as I developed that feeling for using the RPG, means that, for me, I has interest in serving with the rebels, and that's why they gave it to me. When they started being too close to me and they – anyway, some are very supportive to me. Because I had that feeling, to serve.

Both James and Thomas were doing more than what they needed to, to survive. They were actively participating, and helping the LRA, and that initiative got them promoted.

### **10.5.2. *Strong Hearted***

Promotion is primarily based on the attributes of a good soldier, specifically courage and being a good fighter. James, a top commander, used the term 'strong hearted', which meant courage and fighting ability.

James: So when I joined, they gave me that, and they only give ranked to strong hearted individuals, that is how I managed to get that. This depends on one's strong heart, if you have strong

hearts, when you are brave, in the battlefield, that one is okay, because you can run even with empty-handed, and you still survive with a group of people, you are controlling them. That is what I mean. Rank was given on merit basis, if you are capable, that will depend on how many times you have served in the LRA, or the UPDF, or the experience you have, in if you are strong hearted, they can give you that, especially some of us who were hunters before, we were strong hearted and we know what to do, and we were given that ranks. And you keep your forces.

**Strong hearted means having courage in battle:**

Roger: Kony normally, anyway he chooses few because he pick on the people who are courageous, who can adapt to his rules, the conditions and the rules. If he gives an order, and you went to the field, or to the, to raid, and you came with the right thing that he commanded you to go and do, you would be promoted. And for example if you are maybe torn as a commander to go and ambush a vehicle, and rob some items from that vehicle, and when you actually set your ambush, ambush the vehicle and you rob the vehicle, you acquire the item, those items and you brought them to him, you would be promoted. Because of your abidance to the conditions normally given to you.

**Strong hearted also meant being a good fighter when it came to battle:**

Samuel: to get rank is this same as people get from the government. It is according to your ability.

Interviewer: so what kind of qualities are they looking for?

Samuel: When you are a fighter, when you know how to... When you are a good fighter, you are given rank.

Interviewer: So just providing you were a good fighter?

Samuel: Yes. That you are a good fighter. Even if you are here in the government, if you're a good fighter, you are a good behaviour, discipline, you are given rank.

As Samuel pointed out, this criterion for rank is the same as it would be for a government army because these qualities make a good soldier.

### **10.5.3. Killing**

Unsurprisingly, rank is given for killing the enemy in battle. Killing has to occur in battle, and the victim has to be opposition soldiers – killing defenceless

civilians, or abductees who try to escape does not count; rather, recruits have to prove that they are a good soldier on the battlefield.

Alfred: They always give rank, maybe when you what, you have been taken to what, ok, maybe, fighting, and you maybe kill like government soldiers, and they just give you, when you go back, they give you a rank, and for you to be given a rank, maybe you, maybe that people you have killed, you have to what, pick his or her guns, you go with it, just what, that will be the evidence, it shows that this one has what, has fought seriously, so they give you rank.

Miriam pointed out, killing alone is not the only criterion for gaining rank, but being successful in battle is measured by the ability to kill the enemy.

Miriam: Sometimes not only killing, but when you kill is when you mostly get rank. So it even depends on you, how you conduct yourself, how you train other people, they were also give you that rank.

#### **10.5.4. Knowledge**

Knowledge, both in the form of picking up what you learn in training quickly and familiarity with the local area, which gives you the ability to lead, are also basis for promotion. George related that learning quickly leads to rank, and this is because it means you will be a good soldier:

George: They see the capability, through the training. The tests, even in the brain. If you know the movement, if you know the tactics, all those knowledge, they train you. Then you first move to the somebody, who is used to the what, used to the place, and you move with him. He guide you. From there, they can test your capability through direct procedure [war], when they give you, you perform. It's not like after a long time. That one is shortcut.

James pointed out that knowing where you are going made you a leader:

James: You can also be a commander if you follow, if you have the vision of knowing where you are going without entering into the ambush. If you know the compass direction. For example, if

you are going to Goma<sup>29</sup>, you know that, if I'm going to cross from here up to Goma, I will reach without being shot. So you can survive. And with that you also get ranked, because you will lead the group safely.

Thomas himself was made the leader of a group based on his knowledge of the local area:

Thomas: Because our commander realised that there are some other people in their group there, who were born of [town], they are from [town], they know... They have the details about [town], even myself, I was picked among them. We were four. We were picked. For me, they have considered me because, for me, I know the geographical of that, and I know the strengths and weaknesses of that... But the funny thing is, I don't know where my home is. Because, I was arrested, actually, I was abducted before people came to camps. And by that time, people are now in camps. For me, I cannot know where my parents, my relatives are. But I know the location of [town], and [town] barracks very well, and I was taken as the leader, to lead that group.

But Thomas did disclose the downside of knowing a local area: it was his home area, where his family was from, and still lived. He went ahead with the raid, and later found out that his parents were killed in another LRA raid.

### **10.5.5. Rank for Retention**

Finally, rank can be given to ensure that people will not try to leave, during times when fighting is fierce, and numbers are dwindling. This suggests that rank is a reason to stay.

James: by that time, there were serious operations from the government, called Kanagya. That operation was very serious, many were killed, some escaped, and the government was using underground troops, so it was very serious. By then, we were very few and that was the opportunity they were using to give us ranks, so that it will boost you. This is because everyone feels like leaving LRA, I'm going back home. It was until that

<sup>29</sup> A city in the North Kivu region of the Democratic Republic of Congo, bordering Rwanda, which has been the centre of M23 rebel activities, but has never been reported to have been affected by LRA activity.

during the peace talk, 1993 with Betty Bigombe, initiated the peace talk, that is the time that we had the opportunity to really abduct more people, and go with them into Sudan for further training. Otherwise, our number was very few by that time.

Rank is also given to retain good recruits, to entice them to stay:

James: Even the LRA themselves really see the capable people in the group, and hurriedly give you ranks, so you don't have the heart of going home, and stop you of going home because you have a rank, and as I said, if you have a rank or any position, they treat you like a big person and if you escape, they will hunt for you, and take you back. And that is how I started now staying in the bush, with heart of, eh, I will stay now in the bush, not go back home.

Edward: If he [Kony] wants to retain he will just promote.

Both James and Edward were top commanders, and both, I was reliably informed, were responsible for bestowing ranks, but neither spoke as commanders responsible for giving rank. They both referred to a third person. James talked as if he was given rank to stop him leaving, then referred to a second person, 'you'. This may have been a means to distance themselves from the LRA.

## **10.6. “Women are just given free of charge, without even paying a small money”: Benefit of Rank**

Previous research suggests that rank was desirable because it ensured greater access to food and women (Baines, 2009, Pham et al., 2005) and those motivated people to be loyal and to stay (Annan et al., 2008; Vermeij, 2011). This too has been reported in other rebel groups, such as the RUF (Denov, 2010). The benefits of rank, however, are different from the reasons for wanting rank. Once a person has achieved rank, he or she are already loyal, and have actively participated in the LRA to achieve that rank, by demonstrating their commitment and compliance to the group.

Furthermore, the status and power that come with rank appear more important than the material gains, such as shelter and food. The acquisition of a

forced 'wife' is the asset of being a commander, and this is important, not purely for sexual gratification, as some previous research suggests (Annan et al., 2008; Carlson and Mazurana, 2008), but because of the cultural status marriage has. In Ugandan culture, customary marriage requires a man to pay 'bride price', usually in the form of cattle, to the woman's family, and this is a barrier to marriage for many men who do not have the financial means to pay 'bride price'. Furthermore, a sexual relationship with a woman usually necessitates the man to provide her with gifts as a means of maintaining the relationship, meaning men without money are less able to have and keep sexual partners (Nyanzi et al., 2004). Nevertheless, 'having' a woman is a mark of being a 'real man', and being married is a prerequisite for earning respect from the community (Joshi, 2010; Nyanzi et al., 2009). Economic hindrance is a major obstacle in getting a partner and obtaining culturally ideals of masculinity, thus the relative significance of being able to 'get' a woman without the need for money. As a woman, I felt a certain degree of disgust at this characterisation of women as passive objects to be paid for. However, I was gratified to see that three of my female participants at least did not fit this stereotype, and rather came across as independent and self-sufficient. All three – Florence, Grace and Susan – had reached command positions, and Florence was forced to be a 'wife' to not one, but two commanders, including Kony himself. She now single handily raised and supported his child.

The respect and power that comes with rank is also an important perk of rank because of the importance placed on respect and power to the notions of masculinity in Ugandan culture (Nyanzi et al., 2004; Siu, Seeley and Wright, 2013). Status matters, and status in an army in particular, is a signifier of manhood, especially for the Acholi, who have traditionally been soldiers.

### **10.6.1. *Material Gains***

The material benefits to being a commander, are limited, given that they are a rebel group living in the bush. Nevertheless, the two main tangible benefits are getting an 'easy life' and being given a forced 'wife'. Alfred, a sergeant, described some of the benefits that accompany an 'easy life', such as not sleeping outside, and being able to keep the proceeds of looting.

Alfred: Sometimes when we were in the bush there, we could really find it very easy, because we could even get some free things, like even money, we could just go and rob people there, we get money, we get even chickens, what, goats. So, at the beginning, when they had just abducted me, I was really getting some easy life....when you have a rank, you could not really sleep, maybe just under the tree, like maybe those young people who are just been abducted, they don't have any post. You sleep inside the house, where those people just be keeping you. You just sleep somewhere what, a little bit comfortable. You will be comfortable. Rain cannot torture you, even can really eat well. Yeah.

Compared to civilian life, this could well appear to be more of an easy life. The civilian population suffered many hardships as a result of the rebellion, including the looting, and the majority of Acholiland were moved into 'protected camps' for the best part of a decade (Annan, Brier and Aryemo, 2009; Baines, 2007). Michael also discussed the importance of getting a forced 'wife' without paying bride price as a benefit to gaining rank:

Michael: Women are just given free of charge, without even paying a small money. You have not to give any amount of money, because you are just given.

Interviewer: On what basis did they give a woman?

Michael: They normally give women after seeing the recommendable work done, and the period of time taken, and your attitude in the bush. This is when it is given.

What he emphasised is not so much getting a 'wife', but the fact that the man does not have to pay to get a 'wife' thus side stepping a hurdle that may have prevented commanders from getting a wife in civilian life.

### **10.6.2. Small Boss**

The power and responsibility that comes with promotion is an important benefit to rank. Richard termed this being a 'small boss'. The top commanders are referred to as big bosses. Being a 'boss' means being in charge of others, and superiority is a sign of being a man (Siu, Seeley and Wright, 2013):

Richard: I actually became somehow a small boss.... yeah, I was a small boss, I told you I have to ensure the 15 soldiers were

well kept, they had to eat, we sometimes go, we can go and attack, using with this 15 soldiers, ensure that – my role was to ensure that these soldiers are well said, they have guns, they have every necessity that they have. And in case there is a command that I have to go and... There is a duty that I have to execute, have to what, use this 15 soldiers. Unless we are going for a major, major attack. That is when we can now combine ourselves into groups, then we go. Like, you know there is some time, they sent you to going get food for others, so if they choose my group, you going get feed frosts, so I have to lead them, going attacked, then bring the food. So then my role was managing this 15, actually, as in how they should what, behave, and how we should be successful in our missions. We ensure that everything we did conforms to what is required. So I have to manage them.

There is a control component to commanding, in having control of other people. Roger also listed this power and responsibility over the people he led as the first benefit of rank:

Interviewer: and what are the benefits of being promoted?

Roger: The first thing, you'll have your own group, actually section. You'll have that section, that you will be leading. And in that section, you personally, you will not be carrying those luggage is. You'll have your gun to protect you, and even your wife will be there. And secondly, as you have the guards, you can send the guard to go and raid, in case you are having some shortage of food item, your section can go and raid, and they bring them to you. You'll be partly independent. Though other commanders will be above you, but for you, you will be even guiding some others. Others will be your subordinates.

### **10.6.3. Choice**

Rank also gives recruits the power to have more autonomy. Autonomy is a characteristic trait of masculinity (Siu, Seeley and Wright, 2013). They can choose whether or not to participate in fighting. Arthur, a top commander, told me that anyone who was active in the field could choose not to attacks civilians, but very few could choose that. He said he was able to say no, he just wanted to fight in battles, against the UPDF. He said that few could do that, but he could because he was active. While I was sceptical about this, given his paranoia over the ICC, and desire to portray himself as blameless, both Alfred and Thomas also confirmed that commanders could choose not to fight:



Alfred: They respect you, and sometimes they could not really, you really not be what, taken to just to fight some, they just be sitting there. You keep on instructing those what, those young ones.

Interviewer: So you actually don't have to fight so much if you have a rank?

Alfred: It depends. If you feel like to go and fight, you can go. You maybe don't even want to just sit there, you just send those ones, those ones who are young.

Thomas told me how he had decided not to fight, and, because of his rank, he was able to avoid it.

Thomas: So, being a sergeant, I was supposed to get to lead the group, but I told my general, no, I am not going, I refuse to go, because I knew... Someone told me from there, that after looting the foodstuff, the selected people with the looted food stuff, after that, they will be going for some war, which was there to attack the barracks. So I feel tired, and after a big serious war, fighting, ambush, I could not enter into any more fighting again.

#### **10.6.4. Freedom**

On top of having more control over others, commanders are less subject to control themselves: they get more freedom, in terms of not having to carry out menial tasks, and people are expected to cater for them:

James: I became strong hearted in order that I preserve my position, just that I be free, and I'm not killed. So that they give me the rank... what I mean is, when I got a rank, there is that freedom of carrying luggage, of which I used to carry on my back, on my forehead, I would walk long distance, sometimes I'd be sent to guard the group, tree climb and sleep on the tree, trying to really wreck, who is coming. But when I got that rank, all those stopped, and I could now sleep, I could order people to bring water, I drink, I bathe, I have enough rest. I could sit like I am seated now. That is the freedom I mean.

Freedom is relative to what other recruits have, and means that lower recruits will be expected to take on the chores the commander is exempt from doing.

George: When you have a rank, you will have freedoms, you will stay freely, you don't cook, no one will disturb you, you have freedom in war, and the best part of it is also that you cannot easily be killed in case of any attack, because they normally attack those who have rank.

Interviewer: So was your life better, when you got a rank?

George: Yes, somehow that freedom was there, but the movement was constant. You walk long distances, as in normal things everyone, even if you have rank.

Michael also described a commander as having freedom, but he also outlined some of the responsibilities that came with having a command position:

Michael: Is good to be a commander, because there is that freedom. First of all, you as a commander, you also have responsibilities, that people should not escape, people should not be killed, people should not be injured. So when you walking, and bullets start from one side, you know how to dodge them, so you will be on a safer side, at least to being a commander, or having a rank is better than not having, because you get some freedom.

This freedom presumably presents an opportunity for escape. But this was not the case. George told me that while he was able to escape because he had this freedom afforded because of his rank, the motivation to escape actually came from his desire to avoid going for war:

George: It is true that rank that made me to escape in the Bush, because I had freedom, and nobody could force me to do anything. And what even forced me to escape from the Bush, they were having other plans to go into dangerous jobs, to go and fight, to go for war. I don't feel [inaudible] surviving. So that forced me to get out. So it was that freedom that made me escape from the Bush.

Escape was motivated by survival. Freedom and rank did not give George the security that he would survive, which is the reason he left.

### **10.6.5. *Respect***

Similarly to the power and responsibility that come with being a 'small boss', a large part of getting ranks is earning the respect of others. Respect is a

basis for masculinity in Ugandan culture (Siu, Wright and Seeley, 2014). For Richard, the respect came from his inferiors, over whom he had control, and his ability to do so effectively and without resorting to violence is how he got respect:

Richard: You are a respected. You are respected, because if you are now commanding someone, some people, they have to respect you. You get the respect. In the hard way anyway. You get the respect. You know, there are some soldiers who get inferiors, so you have to cool them down sometimes, because our soldiers, you shouldn't actually do something so much against, because with gun someone can just take your life away, whether you are a boss or not. You get the respect.

Miriam, too, appreciated the respect she was able to gain, as a woman, succeeding in a male sphere – the armed forces. For her, respect means being able to 'have voice' and being able to get what she wants

Miriam: People respect you, when other people get something, you will also get it for free, and also have voice to talk and command, and say something and it will happen, in your favour.

The importance of respect is also illustrated by Alfred's complaint that he was shown no respect when he returned to his community:

Alfred: People could really point at me, ah, this one is a rebel, what, there is no respect that they could do, that they could give me. They used to fear me even. Even up to now, there are some that stay fearful.

Alfred noted that the stigma of being a rebel meant that people did not respect him, and even worse, they feared him. Respect is not given out of fear, and commanders do not gain respect because their soldiers feared them. Fear is not, as previous research would suggest, what creates allegiance within the LRA. Instead, it is created through the affirmation of manhood that being a soldier creates.

### **10.6.6. Obstacles to Advancement**

#### **Lower Commanders: Fear**

The obstacle to advancing beyond the first rank for the lower commanders is fear. Courage is an important trait for a soldier to have, and thus a characteristic that leads to advancement within the LRA. Alfred, who got the 'small' rank of sergeant, his first and only rank, admitted that he wanted a rank, but he was fearful in battle, so did not advance beyond his first rank:

Alfred: Yeah, I also wanted to be with, to have a rank, but sometimes, but sometimes when we were taken to fight, they could really be what, so fearful, because fighting, gun, is really very hard, so they have given me that small rank when we were from back, from Congo, and training there. So that was, that is how I got that rank.

George was given his first rank of captain, and he told me that he feared that the LRA, rather than the enemy would kill him, and so he too never advanced beyond his first rank:

George: I was having a rank of captain. Before I was given rank, I stayed with LRA for six months. Because I was with them, and I served with them, they trusted me, and I was also having fear, because I thought, if I am to escape they may arrest me and kill me. Those who tried to escape, they arrest and kill. So they came to trust me and give me that rank...I was given rank of captain, because they saw the capability I was having, and when you are captain, you are supposed to lead the full group.

#### **Top Commanders: Key Contact**

The top commanders reported that education was the reason that they achieved their positions. Arthur told me that in 1991, he was taken up to military headquarters. He said that the knowledge acquired from school, and good spoken English led to his rise. When I asked him to clarify what led to his advancement, he said education and being active in the (battle)field were the qualities that were required to get a high rank. Charles and Samuel, both top commanders, reported that education was important to get promotions into the top ranks:

Charles: Some of the people were sent in schools, in Khartoum, so after their course, they were given a promotion, according to that.

Samuel: Education is also there.

It is important for a top commander to be educated, because it means that they are literate, able to both read and write. Education also means that a person speaks English, the national language, rather than just their local language. Given that up until 1997, there was no free education<sup>30</sup>, not many people in the north received a proper education. Parents could not afford to pay school fees to send their children to school, because of the relative cost of education, and the large number of children many families had. Joseph Kony, for example, did not finish primary school, according to Susan. All but one of the top commanders joined in the late 1980s, at the start of the rebellion, and they all joined as adults. This meant that they had received their education prior to the beginning of the northern conflict, and some of the top commanders told me that they had been taught by British teachers, a legacy of colonialism.

The importance attached to education may serve to explain why the LRA tends to target schools for abduction, not only because there is an abundance of youths to recruit, but it also means that they will be literate (Cheney, 2005). This no doubt serves as a reason not to attend school for some Acholi youth. Annan et al. (2008) state that one of the two qualities that commanders want in a forced wife is education (the other was beauty), so that she could write down radio commands. Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front also are reported to have wanted literate recruits, as their orders were primarily relayed through written messages (Peters and Richards, 1998).

Colin was the only top commander I spoke to who had been abducted as a child, in the early 1990s. Colin advanced slowly through the ranks, and

<sup>30</sup> In 1997, the Ugandan government introduced Universal Primary Education, which provided free primary school education, and in 2007, they introduced Universal Primary Education, which provided free secondary school education (Kelly and Odama, 2011). However, there are still other costs attached to school attendance, which families struggle to meet (Heninger, 2005).

managed to penetrate the inner core of the LRA, and become a top commander. Colin's rise to the top commander can be attributed to a key contact who assisted his ascent. Colin was abducted by the man who became Kony's second in command, prior to his execution, Otti-Lagony. Otti-Lagony, for his part, patronised Colin because they were from the same village:

Colin: The group that abducted me was Otti-Lagony's. Otti-Lagony's home is next to our place. The sister was my own teacher, by the name of Amela...By then Otti-Lagony was the one controlling the place, used to call him Chief of Staff...I sat down, after his order, he brought chicken, tea, and we started taking together, and those were brought by his women. He started asked me, how is home? I told him, home was fine, because he had known me by then. He started asking for his sisters, Amela, if Amela is there, I told him Amela died. He then asked me, if I liberate you now and you go home, are you able to do it? I told him yes. Then he asked me, do you want to go back to school? I said yes, I want to go back to school...By then he ordered that I should be given water to bather, brand new gum boots should be given to me, brand new uniform should be given to me. And after that immediately, everything was done according to his words, and he took me and I started staying in his house. And he gave a small bag full of tapes, and carrying his suits, the small ones, only.

Colin rose through the ranks quickly as a result of this Otti-Lagony's patronage:

Colin: The reason why I stayed with Kony is, let me explain to you. Otti-Lagony met me and took me, and now I was abducted. So this is how my rank started. When I entered Sudan, I started getting my rank from lance corporal, its one V here [on the shoulder], that one I was given because of my big discipline....he [Otti-Lagony] made me become his own 'aidie'. An aidie normally see the welfare of the boss, what is the boss going to eat, is it safe for him, is his bed well laid, who is that woman going to really serve him tonight? So that one was my work and tasks.

Previous research in the careers of criminals notes that in the early stages of a person's career in a network, a person is unlikely to have many opportunities available to them, so they must rely on key contacts, whose contacts and resources they utilise to rise within the network (Morselli 2001, 2003). It is therefore possible that Colin managed to transcend the barriers to get into the

inner core of the LRA because of his key contacts. ICC indictee Dominic Ongwen was also abducted as a child, and he was placed under the care of Vincent Otti, Kony's then second-in-command, and this contact may help explain how he himself rose within the LRA (Baines, 2009). Patronage has been reported to be an important part of inspiring loyalty in the RUF (Denov, 2010) – although whether it impacts promotion within other groups has not been explored in previous research.

### **10.7. “You have no option, other than to become loyal”: Loyalty**

While compliance is based purely on self-interest and survival (Biderman, 1975), allegiance suggests some loyalty to the group. Gaining rank appears to provide the LRA with loyalty from their recruits, but when asked directly about loyalty, participants tended to talk about others being loyal. Michael, a second lieutenant, described how recruits became loyal to him, but that he also had to demonstrate some loyalty to them by keeping them safe:

Michael: It is easy to get loyal soldiers. This is because they look at us as big people, and always they are loyal to us. And not every time we are loyal to them. It is sometimes we are not loyal to them, because if you are always loyal to them, it means sometimes they will do things in their own manners, so we have got to balance that loyalty. So if you are seated under the veranda. Maybe under someone's home, and they are seated under the veranda, you have got to make sure that they are not being washed by rain, they should be in a safer position, and if you cook under the tree, they will also be loyal by guarding me.

The army hierarchy and command structure seem, according to Michael's account, to be what created loyalty. Richard, a corporal, portrayed loyalty more as a survival tactic for recruits:

Richard: Yeah, yeah. They [abductees] became loyal. Because you have no option, other than to become loyal. You have no option. Totally. If they abduct you now, you go to the bush, they command you, because now, if you refuse, the end result is death. If you accept, then you will live. So everyone you abduct becomes loyal. There was no, there was no room for

proper understanding, the only thing you should do, follow that, what they want. So definitely you become loyal. Just follow their command, to live.... Being loyal means, if you were told to do something, you will follow. You should not think of escaping. You should attack, and achieve, you should always achieve in your mission. You should not lose fight. There were no clear rules and regulations that were put in place, as in writing, what. The rules were just verbally, when they say do this, do, when they say going do this, you do. There was no major rules and regulations, as in this army has. Of course the rules that there you cannot, you should not stand against your colleague, like you begin fighting your colleague, you kill, and the rest of it, no. You should not do it. Unless he has done something wrong, and then you report to your immediate boss, this person has done this. Then if they find him guilty, they punish him.

Richard also mentioned loyalty between recruits, as Michael did, not just to the LRA. Richard went on to explain to me that people choose to stay with the LRA, and do not take the opportunity to escape when they could, and this demonstrates their loyalty:

Richard: There are many people who feel the loyalty. There are many, there are many. That is why the people can still come and fight, and they don't actually escaped, despite the fact they can have a lot of chances of escaping when they come to Uganda. They don't. They just go back. That one shows a lot of loyalty.

This sentiment was echoed by a UPDF commander. He told me that the people who stayed with the LRA after the amnesty were all considered to be rebels rather than abductees, because the amnesty had given them the opportunity to leave. The fact that they stayed, he said, made them rebels, and so when the UPDF caught them, they were captured, not rescued.

Loyalty within the LRA is not just to each other and to the group itself, but some participants are loyal to the commander of the LRA, Joseph Kony. Grace, a lieutenant and the highest ranking woman I talked to, told me that her personal contact with Kony – although limited compared to that of the top commanders – made her loyal to him specifically:



Grace: Kony make us loyal to him by calling us, eat together. Like I myself, we ate together, you could see him laughing, very happy, we enjoy everything together.

Alfred, a sergeant, was too low to have direct contact with Kony, and yet he too reported feeling loyal to Kony, and wanting him to be President, because of the promises of personal rewards that would bring to him:

Interviewer: Did you want him to be President?

Alfred: Then, I wanted him to be. By then I also wanted him to be a president... Because he used to tell us that maybe when I become a president, you are, you'll be under my control, I'll maybe give you some good positions, and really I even think he would be, what, be the President.

Loyalty is reported in other rebel groups to be inspired by the patronage systems of commanders, who become 'surrogate fathers' to the children they abduct (Gates, 2011), similar to the relationship between Colin and his mentor, Otti-Lagony. In this instance, loyalty to the father figure creates loyalty to the group as a whole.

## **10.8. "I was seeing no future": Leaving**

Ultimately, everyone I spoke to had left the group only the top commanders and Susan who had not done so willingly, and in those instances they stayed because they feared the consequences of leaving, the threat of possible death or prosecution. Previous research suggests that the decision to leave had come as an 'awakening', when recruits made an abrupt realisation that they no longer wanted to stay (Annan, Blattman and Horton, 2006). But I found that no one really expressed a desire to actually stay with the LRA, even though they may have wanted to get rank and advance; the reasons they stayed were more reasons not to leave, rather than actively wanting to stay. They were threatened by both the LRA, and by their community on account of the acts of violence they had committed. The recruits had nothing to lose from staying and nothing to gain from leaving. The reasons they eventually left were a complex mix of pushes and pulls, fear and ultimately, disillusionment with the LRA, the

war, and the threat of violence that served to prevent them escaping in the first place. Unlike other conflicts, the LRA rebellion is ongoing, and people leave during the conflict, rather than because the war has come to an end.

### **10.8.1. *Reasons to Stay***

Some recruits, such as George and Susan, saw reasons to stay with the LRA. Despite the tough conditions of rebel warfare, the lack of opportunity that returning home would bring outweighed the promise that the LRA would lead to opportunities:

George: I wanted to stay, perhaps, because I was seeing no future. That's when I took two years. Because I believed it could be something very good for me, and it would also be my future. But when I stayed two years, I had not seen the changes, so I decided to leave.

### **10.8.2. *Reasons Not to Leave***

Fear is a big motivation not to leave because the recruits were scared what would happen to them when they returned. Here, they did not fear retribution from the LRA, but from their community. Grace told me that the *Amnesty Act* was the only reason she left the bush, because it meant she could not be prosecuted or killed:

Grace: In the process of joining, we heard that there is amnesty, so that is the courage I got, because when we were in the bush, also people were telling us about the amnesty, people could go and talk on the radio, and we could listen. So that gave us a lot of courage, not only me, but many of us. That's why you see us all walking here. But I thought, if the amnesty act is not here, and I am to die, then that is not of my own making. I was being forced really to walk, to fight. And I want to tell you, the amnesty really played a very big role....Let me tell you that, I better accept to die I the bush if there was no amnesty, because I know for sure if I am to come back I would die. So amnesty played a very big role, and I came because of the amnesty.

Susan was the only non-top commander that I spoke to who did not leave of her own will. She had been tasked by Kony to take one of his 'wives' to

hospital in Juba, because of complications relating to her pregnancy. After Kony's 'wife' had safely given birth, the Sudanese handed Susan over to the Ugandan army:

Susan: We never wanted to come, I, myself. I never wanted to come because on several occasions, around three or four time that we resisted the plane, and I wanted to stay there, because we feel that if anyone who sneaks and comes home will be killed. And we knew that coming out, being the top official with Kony, that was not particularly good, we shall be killed. So, I never wanted to come.

Susan, like the top commanders, particularly feared coming out because she had been close to Kony, although not in the capacity of a commander, but rather as a medic. She was terrified that this proximity to Kony would result in her being killed if she returned home. Interestingly, the top commanders themselves, although still clearly terrified of ICC prosecution, even though they are now safely out, never discussed fear of leaving the LRA. All had been captured/rescued by the UPDF, so none had left the LRA through choice, and all claimed that they had only stayed because their families had been threatened. Ultimately, their fear of the ICC no doubt coloured their portrayal of events, and meant none of them would admit to fear of retribution from the community as Susan had. Their residency in the Establishment, though, spoke volumes. They may not have admitted fear of the community, but they clearly could not return to theirs.

### **10.8.3. *Reasons Not to Stay***

Alfred told me that he wanted to get another rank in the LRA, and this was a reason to stay, but he heard his friend over Radio Mega, which is used to broadcast the stories of returnees to persuade rebels that it is safe to come out of the bush and return home. Alfred reported that this broadcast reassured him that his friend, who left the LRA, was indeed home, and was 'free' – a term that was used a lot, and did not just refer to physical freedom.

Alfred: I wanted, but now, I wanted to have another rank, but when I, I remember I told you that when my fellow, I escaped from there, and they always take them to speak over the radio, so when I hear his voice over the radio that he is already at

home, that's when I what, I also change up my mind that I should also come back home. Because those people, they could say, I am at home here, we just free, we are being cared by our parents, even, they could give us like, like free things, even like food they distribute to them. See. And those who want go back to school. They are also being paid by the government, or some NGOs that are there. That's why I what, I made up my mind that I should now what, come back home. Otherwise I would have been someone big also.

His ambivalence over leaving is clear. He contemplated what might have been had he not left – that he would have achieved a higher ranks, and be 'someone big'. George also did not express a particular desire to desert, even mentioning that he thought of staying, but the failure of the LRA to meet his basic needs, for food, is what made him decide not to stay:

George: we had idea of staying in the Bush, and we delayed, we took so many years in the Bush. They just focus on fighting. That's why they keep on what, maintain. Then they keep on abducting. Every time you get somebody of that age, 12 to 15, you abduct. But what chased us away from there was the problem of food, hunger.

Patience, the only one of my participants not to have got a rank, was actually released by Kony, because women and children had become a burden to him. Though Patience did not choose to leave, she did not object to leaving, either, as Susan had, because staying with the LRA, with young children, had become a burden to her too, and, like George, the lack of food became a reason not to stay:

Patience: It was in 2004 that Kony saw that staying with the women and children was becoming a challenging to him, because we could not really walk at the speed that they want, and every time children be crying, children need water, children need food, and they could not give...so we went back to Sudan... and the soldiers said you can now go, because our behind is further than our in front, now go and survive, and ask someone they will lead you to any place, maybe like centres or barracks, or in the camps.

#### **10.8.4. Reasons to Leave**

Edward, a top commander, was captured by the UPDF. He told me he was rescued by the UPDF. While relating a story of how he was almost killed when the UPDF came across him in battle, he told me why he wanted to leave:

Interviewer: Why did you want to escape?

Edward: Because I didn't join willingly.

Edward nevertheless stayed with the LRA for over two decades. That the legacy of forced recruitment ultimately led to his desire to leave was also expressed by Richard:

Richard: I had been thinking for long that I should leave this thing, I should leave. Because I did not go voluntarily. I was abducted. Yeah, so when I got that chance, I left.

Richard had also stayed with the LRA, and gained the rank of corporal, so the decision to leave based on forced recruitment is not an enduring one, but rather seemed to come about after a significant period of time with the group. This is contrary to research on other groups, which posit that “the deterrents against escape... are internal as well as external” (Wessells, 2002, p.244), whereby the repeated violence reconfigures the abductees identity to the point where they could not return home. In many conflicts, the abductees only do return home because the war has ended (Denov, 2010).

The lower ranking forced recruits all escape, eventually. The impact of forced recruitment temporarily creates bonds to the group, and more enduringly, to each other, but forced recruits could not be turned into voluntary rebels. The LRA serves a purpose for the recruits – it allows them to access to power and responsibility, and to marriage – the culturally defined attributes of manhood. By advancing within a rebel group, the recruits are in fact adhering to the conventional societal expectations of what being a ‘real man’ is seen to be. In the process, they come to be complicit in acts that mean they cannot go home without ramifications. This complicates the decision to leave, when they eventually decide to go. The LRA creates allegiance amongst its recruits to both

the goals of the rebellion and to each other through structures that reflect cultural standards that men seek to achieve, and in a manner that the Acholi specifically traditionally achieved status: as fighters.

## 11. Conclusion

'You know we have our proverb in our home in Kitgum, because we do eat rats, that if you want to get rats, very good, fat rats, wait at the dry season, when the grass are all burnt. Because rat will not run faster, that one is very easy to kill rat, dry season. Why don't the ICC wait till dry season to come so they get Kony at home, here?' – Samuel

The advice that one of Kony's former top commanders has for the ICC. Kony is heading a rebellion that has lasted for twenty-seven years. Military campaigns, spanning three countries, and involving forces from four nations have failed to apprehend or stop him. He has never faced justice for the atrocities he has wreaked on the people of northern Uganda, southern Sudan, and now the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Kony may not have achieved the articulated goals of the LRA, but he was successful in sustaining his rebellion, and he did this when the vast majority of his fighters did not join willingly. Forced recruits have no reason to be loyal to the group that abducted them, have no incentive to stay and participate, and would be expected to abandon the group as soon as the opportunity arose. My participants had stayed with the group, and all but one had risen through the ranks. I strategically chose to interview people who had been with the group for at least two years and gained a rank in order to understand why they stayed and what made them get rank.

The LRA retain its recruits through finely tuned internal control mechanisms, using both the threat of violence and spirits, which prevent people from trying to escape. Contrary to the findings in previous research, the LRA does not try and subdue or terrorise their recruits into staying. Abductions are reported to be relatively violence free – but recruits are threatened with violence if they try to escape, which effectively coaxes them into staying. The LRA

manipulates familiar institutions, in terms of religion and spirits, which are keystones to Acholi society, and to which the recruits would have been exposed to and thus can exert influence over them. The use of the Hebrew Bible's tenet of divine retribution, combined with the apparent prophetic powers of Kony to read their minds, play upon the Acholi tradition of *ajwaka* (spirit mediums) and *nebi* (prophets), mean that recruits come to police their own behaviour to avoid death. The actions of forced recruits are controlled through the fear of violence and spiritual retaliation.

While abduction may be indiscriminate in every regard except for age – and my research confirmed that it was twelve to fifteen year olds that were most likely to be abducted (Annan, Blattman and Horton, 2006; Beber and Blattman, 2013) – that does not mean that all teenaged recruits are worth the same, nor that the LRA's sole requirement for a recruit is their age. Instead, teenagers are the most desirable age group because they are most likely to possess the other qualities that the LRA really want, qualities that make them good soldiers, and therefore good rebels. The LRA want recruits who are brave, courageous, good fighters and obedient. The LRA select people who meet these requirements by purging people who do not. All recruits are exposed to the realities of life in the bush, such as constant travel and battles, and people who cannot survive die, and those who fail to show courage in battle or are detrimental to the success of the LRA are killed. Violence towards new recruits, therefore, is used solely to exterminate recruits who are not going to make good soldiers. It is not, as previous research has suggested, used to initiate the recruits to the group, or to burn bridges with their community; violence is just used to prove who possesses the necessary skills to survive with the LRA.

Violence is not an effective means of inspiring loyalty. People will comply to avoid punishment, but it does not create allegiance. Within the LRA, violence is directed outwards against a common enemy, and not inwards, against one another. This is because the LRA abduct people to be soldiers. The group uses abduction because they are unable to mobilise voluntary recruits, but this does not alter the fact that they need soldiers. Using abduction means that the LRA is forced to gain compliance from the abductees, which would have been a given with



voluntary recruits. But that is where the difference between forced and voluntary recruits ends. Ultimately, the LRA needs the same things from forced recruits as it does from voluntary recruits: good, brave fighters who will support and advance the group.

Camaraderie between members of the group is important to foster bonds among soldiers, and by extension, the group. New recruits report receiving guidance from those who had been with the group longer, and these relationships help the new recruit to settle in, learning the norms of the group and create a connection to the LRA. Commanders, too, take care of recruits. The command structure within the LRA makes higher-ranking soldiers responsible for the well-being of lower ranking soldiers. Indeed, when one of my participants failed to take care of his soldiers, and forced them to fight each other, he was punished. The soldiers are all valuable members of the LRA, because they contribute to the fighting force of the group. One participant termed the environment of support among soldiers as 'bush morale'. Lasting friendships develop in the bush and these were evident to see even out of the bush. The basis for loyalty, rather than just compliance, comes from the recruits' relationships with one another.

Life within the LRA is highly structured. There are rules – many coming from the spirits, although some have practical purposes – that have to be obeyed by all recruits. Failure to obey these rules results in punishment, which is a means to control the behaviour of recruits. Rules around 'marriage', for example, though victimising women by enslaving them in forced relationships with commanders, also serve to prevent the indiscriminate rape of female recruits, as has occurred in other rebel groups (Denov, 2010). Pre-pubescent girls, too, are spared from defilement. Other rules are attributed purely to the spirits.

Advancement within the LRA comes because of demonstrable compliance and commitment, and in turn, rank reaffirms commitment to the group. Recruits have to demonstrate ability, initiative, courage and that they can kill; in short, they have to show they are good soldiers, much the same as they would in a regular army. The benefits of rank are largely non-material – rank gives a recruit respect,

power, freedom and the ability to 'marry', all cultural conceptions of masculinity. The military was traditionally the Acholi career of choice – a result of the British desire not to arm the southern tribes, who could pose a threat to colonial rule. The less developed northern tribes were not seen as a threat, and so were drafted into the armed forces, thus creating the identity of an Acholi man as a 'warrior' and situating the ideals of manhood in the role of a soldier.

Rank is desirable because the LRA allows recruits to enter into socially respected institutions that civilian life would have denied them, not just because of the poverty and displacement resulting from the ongoing conflict, but also because of the exclusion from the institution traditionally employed to attain manhood – the armed forces. The LRA are not replicating familiar societal structures, as Cheney (2005) suggested, but rather giving men access to these institutions that they would otherwise be unable to attain. It allows men to be men.

Patience remains with her bush husband, and Roger reported that he too still lived with his forced 'wife' and their three children, and I wonder how much that is because the women, too, saw a rebel with rank as a successful soldier and thus a 'real' man. That is not to dismiss the sexual and physical violence experienced in these forced unions. Florence and Esther both reported the horrors of their bush 'marriages'.

Women, too, relished the access to male status that rank allowed them to achieve. Uganda – especially the north – is a patriarchal society, and women are expected to fill traditional gender roles, as wives and mother (El-Bushra and Sahl, 2005; Silberschmidt, 2001). In many ways, women are forced into these traditional roles within the LRA, because of the nature of forced marriage, and subsequent childbirth that resulted from rape within these 'marriages'. But all the women were expected to fight just as men were, and as such are eligible to achieve rank. When they do so, they earn the same benefits as men do: female commanders are respected, as men are, they lead units, as men do, they give orders, as men do. As commanders, women are afforded the same status as men, which they could not hope to achieve in civilian life. Like men, women

wanted rank because they could get a status and respect they could not get outside the LRA.

As soldiers, the recruits have to participate in fighting. New recruits often reported having to fight to survive. Success in battle is a basis for promotion and recruits who advance to command positions often come to find meaning in the violence they commit. The violence, nonetheless, is problematic. Recruits know that fighting and killing makes it far harder for them to return to civilian life. The top commanders, for their part, have the fear of international prosecution hanging over them. The potential consequences of their violence is far more serious: indictment at the International Criminal Court, and though unlikely, given the Court's inability to try the first five LRA commanders they have indicted, and Uganda's growing reluctance towards the Court, they fear this. As such, they deny any involvement in violence. All of the top commanders I interviewed had been with the LRA since its inception, apart from one, who had been the protégé of Kony's second in command, Otti-Lagony, until Otti-Lagony was executed. This suggests that promotion to the inner circle is not possible without a mentor.

Entry into the inner circle exposes a person to the spiritual world of the LRA. The spiritual aspect of the LRA is the least understood in previous research. The LRA has adopted far more of the beliefs of the HSM than has been reported. The beliefs are an amalgamation of traditional Acholi belief in spirits and Christian beliefs. They contaminate every aspect of the LRA's actions: young children are taken because they are cleaner. This is true for both girls and boys. There are rituals surrounding most aspects of social life, and even fighting. The spirits prove to be a divisive issue, as only the top commanders fully understand the spirits and their role in the LRA rebellion. For the lower commanders, the spirits serve only as an internal control mechanism, as they believe that Kony could know if they are planning to escape. The top commanders believe Kony is a prophet, who can predict the future, which naturally gives him a strategic advantage against the UPDF. Nevertheless, the lower – and, usually – younger recruits may not believe because that is another part of Acholi society that has been eroded by the war.

The belief in the spirits is necessary for the top commanders because it absolves them of responsibility for the atrocities they no doubt ordered or participated in during their time with the LRA. The belief in divine retribution, too, serves as evidence that they have not sinned, because they are not dead. Kony, for his part, needs the top commanders to believe in the spirits, because he himself has no other credibility as a rebel leader. Kony is not a military man. He has received no combat training, has never served in an army, and has no more than a primary school education, all qualities that do not leave him in a strong position to lead a rebellion. His top commanders, on the other hand, are all alleged to have been soldiers in the UNLA or UPDA – although only one admitted this to me – and so have the military capabilities Kony must lack. This puts Kony's position in jeopardy. The indiscriminate violence he frequently displays towards his top commanders when he perceives them as a threat to his authority suggests he knows this. It is imperative, therefore, that the top commanders believe in his spiritual powers for him to maintain his hold on power.

The differing beliefs over the spirits between the inner circle and the rest of the LRA also impact the belief in the goals of the LRA. The top commanders, in keeping with their belief in the religious and spiritual aspects of the LRA, believe that the goal of the rebellion, too, is rooted in religion. Specifically, they believe the LRA is fighting to impose the Ten Commandments on Uganda. The lower commanders, on the other hand, believe that the LRA is fighting to overthrow the government. This serves as an effective motivation for them to fight, in the same manner that the Ten Commandments motivate the top commanders. The lower commanders believe that they will get a position in Kony's new government, that they will benefit from the rebellion, and achieve status they could not otherwise attain. Participants reported that they wanted rank because they believed in this goal, and some found meaning in the fighting because of what they were fighting for. The LRA calls upon familiar and comforting structures for its legitimacy, and for the lower commanders at least, its goals appear to be rooted in valid historical grievances

Despite ties to the group in both allegiance and killing, all the people I talked with had left the group. Rebellions are not supposed to be sustained over

several decades: they are formed to achieve a goal, and the LRA has failed to do this. Recruits gain status and meaning from staying in the group, but ultimately, the cost of staying comes to outweigh the risk of leaving. Initially, the threat of violence, from both within the LRA and the community they sought to return to was an effective control mechanism. Some left when they no longer feared death, some left because an opportunity presented itself, and some did not leave through choice at all. The top commanders did not choose to leave, and neither did Susan, the only other participant who had been close to Kony. Their proximity to Kony made them far more vulnerable to prosecution and retribution from their community, so the cost of leaving was far higher, even when the risk of staying meant being vulnerable to Kony's irrational violence.

Prior research treated former abductees as victims, but in fact the people I talked to had resisted victimhood, by becoming perpetrators instead. When abductees become perpetrators, they are able to exercise some control over their life. Alternatively, maybe abductees are actually the ideal victim because they do assimilate and adopt the beliefs of the LRA. In situations of prolonged captivity, such as hostage taking or domestic violence, the perpetrator depends on his victim, needing not just compliances, but also affirmation. They want to create a willing victim, but submission is not enough: they want surrender, and it needs to be of the victim's own free will (Lewis Herman, 2010). This may be another explanation for the compliance and allegiance that my participants reported, but having talked only to the victims it is hard to qualify this explanation.

Prior research on child soldiers who have been forcefully recruited has argued that child soldiers stay with the group that abducted them because they have been terrorised or traumatised not to leave (e.g. Wessell, 1997, 2002). This research focuses on a specific subset of this group: child soldiers who rose through the ranks. The findings challenge this prevalent assumption that child soldiers stay because they are traumatised into doing so. Achieving rank has benefits beyond the marginal benefits reported in prior research (e.g. Vermeij, 2011), and, as demonstrated by research on the RUF, some acts of violent take on a more voluntary nature as the forced recruits begin to find meaning and enjoyment in carrying them out (Maclure and Denov, 2006). However, none of the

top commanders that I spoke to mentioned being involved in violence – only the mid or low ranking commanders admitted that they had participated in – and in some cases come to enjoy – the fighting and violence that seems to characterise the LRA's war.

This is not to deny the psychological impact that being abducted has on children, and the role it may play in them staying with the rebels, given they may be less equipped than adults to escape or cope out of the group, or alternatively, they come to view the LRA as a family. The patronage that commanders have over some of the younger recruits – as was the case with Colin and Otti-Lagony – helps them to feel 'part' of the LRA, as has been reported in the RUF (Denov, 2010; Gates, 2011).

The main findings of my research relate to the use of violence, the spiritual aspects of the LRA, and allegiance amongst recruits. My research also reveals insights into the role of women within the LRA, which has in prior research so often been relegated to that of sex slave (see Carlson and Mazurana, 2008; Moscardino et al., 2012). Although it was not a central enough finding to be a theme, I found that women had actively attained rank, and had even wanted rank; they fought with the men, and even commanded men. One participant, Richard, explained the role of women very succinctly, telling me: "they are not abducted as wives, they are abducted as soldiers."

The research was impacted by the veracity and openness of the people I interviewed. I found it problematic to interview returnees who had recently been through the reception centres – which tend to be funded and run by white people – as part of their reintegration progress. This was because the potential participants wanted money to talk to me. On one occasion, a recent returnee, Andrew, immediately demanded 1 million shillings (about US\$400) for the interview, then 50,000 UGX (about US\$20), and when he eventually agreed to do the interview without financial remuneration, he told me he would 'squeeze me because I had squeezed him', which transpired to mean that he would give one sentence responses to my questions, and did not want the interview recorded. Another time, I went to a nearby town to interview a man who had recently

returned from the bush and been through a reception centre. The head of the Establishment accompanied me, but when we reached his shack, the man was aggressive, demanding to know what was in it for him if he talked to me, asking if I would be the one who got all the benefit. He ultimately refused to be interviewed. But I noticed in his shack, where there was barely an inch to move in what served as both his work and living space was a brand new, open laptop. The proprietor who had accompanied me told me that this man had spent a month in a reception centre and that he therefore saw a white person and thought we were rich and so he wanted money, although he would not shed light on how this man acquired the laptop. Another of my participants related that an NGO had built a house for her, so I could only assumed that is how he acquired the laptop. Branch (2009) has commented that aid agencies see and need to see people as helpless victims, so people who have been through the reception centres are more likely to present themselves as helpless victims. But these two men who had been through the reception centres were not vulnerable former abductees. The people who survive within the LRA are the people who thrive in conditions of adversity. I was concerned about the impact this mercenary attitude, no doubt facilitated by the reception centres, would have on interviews, whether they would only want to talk to me for money, or whether they would purposefully present themselves as victims. I tried not to talk to people who went through reception centre, although this was not necessarily in my hands.

I was also warned about people pretending to have been with the LRA in order to benefit from the Reinsertion package given to all returnees, through the Amnesty Commission. The package included a cash payment, which is relatively large by local standards, and therefore desirable, and caused resentment among non-abductees who had been victimised by the war and the LRA, because they viewed aid as being given to perpetrators not victims (Blattman and Annan, 2008). Such people would falsely claim to be former LRA soldiers. It was often the role of the proprietor in charge of the Establishment to determine the veracity of returnees, by seeing if the person's account was similar to the experiences of others, and whether the commanders at the Establishment had heard of him. Northern Uganda has been ravaged by the effects of the conflict, and people

were looking for ways to exploit people for money, especially the whites, who in turn were seen as exploiting the war. This potentially impacted who was willing to talk to me, and what they were willing to say.

## **11.1. Implication for Policy**

This research has implications for the approach in dealing with former abductees who return to civilian life. My participants, and others like them, pose a problem for reintegration efforts. They are not fully victims, as they have embraced the role of a rebel, and have come to perpetrate acts of violence against the civilian population. But they are not fully rebels, either, because they did not join voluntarily, and did not choose to partake in the rebellion, at least initially. This research demonstrates that abductees are subject to the threat of violence and death if they do not obey their captors, and their capacity to exercise free will is severely limited by the coercive environment they find themselves in. My participants reported that they did what they needed to, to survive. The LRA has finely tuned control mechanisms to ensure that the people they recruit do not and could not leave. Furthermore, the LRA tends to abduct teenagers, who are psychologically less mature and therefore less equipped to cope in such circumstances. It is no coincidence that many criminal justice systems, including Uganda and the International Criminal Court, under whose jurisdiction their crimes fall, do not hold juveniles under the age of eighteen criminally culpable (Article 26 of the Rome Statute; Children Act 2000).

### **11.1.1. *Child Soldiers***

Child soldier are used worldwide – they are not unique to the LRA, nor to African rebellions (Denov, 2010). The presence and use of child soldiers in modern day conflicts has been brought to international attention. The Special Court for Sierra Leone found Liberian President Charles Taylor guilty of the enlistment and conscription of child soldiers – among other things – in 2012, and sentenced to spend fifty years in prison. Likewise, the International Criminal Court – the first permanent court designed specifically to prosecute those



individuals who have the greatest criminal responsibility for the most serious international crimes – has convicted Congolese warlord Thomas Lubanga of enlisting, conscripting and using child soldiers in the Force Patriotique pour la Libération du Congo [Patriotic Force for the Liberation of Congo], sentencing him to fourteen years imprisonment (Amobos and Njikam, 2013; Francis, 2007; ICC, 2014).

According to customary international law, the recruitment or use of anyone under the age of fifteen in armed conflict is prohibited, but some protocols, such as the Optional Protocol to the Covenant on the Rights of the Child, on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, and both the Cape Town Principles and Practices (1997) and The Paris Principles (2007), set the age limit at eighteen. But around twenty countries, including Canada and the United Kingdom have a recruitment age of 16 for their militaries, and the United Kingdom will allow soldiers under the age of 18 to go into armed combat (Forces Watch, February 2011). The fact that Western countries allow teenagers to join the armed forces and participate in battle demonstrates that it is not a clear cut issue. While the United Kingdom and Canada are not violating international law – which sets the limit on recruitment at 14 – it does violate some international protocols, although these are not binding. If Western nations are unable or unwilling to abide by these international protocols, how applicable are these protocols within African settings?

The role of child soldiers in conflicts presents challenges in how to respond to them once they leave the armed group. The dominant discourse the child soldiers are traumatised into staying with the group justifies treating them as innocent victims once they have left the group, yet as my research demonstrates, and prior research in Sierra Leone has supported (Maclure and Denov, 2006), some child soldiers do enjoy their role as a rebel, and come to commit violence for enjoyment rather than survival. This is complicated by the fact that research has consistently demonstrated that child soldiers do suffer psychological effects of their time with the group – although the instruments used to measure this were not designed with child soldiers in mind (Betancourt, 2011). The role of agency, and the issue of how much free will these force recruits exercise – despite the

coercive nature of the environment in which they find themselves – raises questions regarding how they should be treated once the conflict ends. Their role is complex – even when they have committed crimes, they remain victims of their abduction.

The LRA cases before the ICC is particularly relevant to the issue of child soldiering, because one of the five indictees, Dominic Ongwen, is himself a former child soldier. He has been charged with the crime of enslavement – one of the three war crimes he has been indicted for – even though he himself was forcibly abducted at the age of ten, making him a victim of an international crime of which he is also accused. The ICC is not charging Ongwen with any crimes he committed as a child soldier – the Rome Statute did not come into force until Ongwen was 22, and Article 26 of the Rome Statute prohibits the trial of anyone under the age of 18. This demonstrates that the ICC does not view children as perpetrators, much the same as they are viewed in many national courts. But it does raise the question of childhood and criminal responsibility. International law does not provide any guide lines on how to deal with child soldiers (Grossman, 2007), who are often time both victims and perpetrators.

Assigning responsibility for international crimes in general presents challenges, as it is generally a large number of people who have contributed to and participated in these offences. International criminal tribunals – and the ICC specifically – are designed to hold those most responsible to account for the most serious international crimes (war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and crimes of aggression). This raises the issue of who, exactly, the most responsible is: “those who committed them (crimes), those who ordered them, those who allowed them, or maybe those who started the war in the first place” (Ingierd and Syse, 2005, p.86). In criminal courts, it is the decision maker who is held to be the most responsible, as they are the ones who had the choice to act differently, or not to act, but – especially with former child soldiers – how much choice can they really perceived to be exercising?

### **11.1.2. Amnesty**

The challenge of how to deal with child soldiers comes when they begin to participate in the LRA because they find meaning or enjoyment in the fighting; when they choose to stay when they could try to leave; when they do more than is necessary to merely protect their lives. My participants were, for the most part, actively involved in fighting: most had abducted others, most admitted to committing acts of violence, and all the men I interviewed had taken forced wives. In the coercive environment of the LRA, as well as the reality of life in the bush, and the very real challenges of returning home, how responsible can these people be considered for what they did? The *Amnesty Act* grants them all a blanket pardon: from the child soldiers to the top commanders, none are held responsible.

But this lack of responsibility is creating problems for reintegration. Prior research has reported that the community, and even at times, the returnees themselves, do not view them as blameless (Akello, Ritchers and Reis, 2006). I found, too, returnees who had become commanders exploited reception centres' decision to treat them as victims, and clearly felt a sense of entitlement. While they might not be wholly culpable, they are not blameless, either, and the reception centres appear to be encouraging these returnees to expect outside support, such as money, and not try to support themselves, or move on from their life – and status – within the LRA.

The implications that this research has for policy, therefore, are for an element of responsibility in the *Amnesty Act*. This need not be punitive. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, for example, required that a perpetrator confess his or her crimes before they could receive amnesty. This meant that the perpetrators took some responsibility for what they had done, but in the spirit of reconciliation (Quinn, 2009). An element of confession in the Ugandan *Amnesty Act* would challenge the culture of impunity that I witnessed.

The reason that many of the abductees stayed and advanced within the LRA was because of the status they enjoyed. Therefore, reintegration efforts should be geared towards offering these former rebels the opportunity to gain

status and respect within a legitimate organisation. This could involve drafting them in to the government army, or providing them with the necessary skills and training to be able to be successful in a civilian job. The Uganda government had initially recruited former rebels into the UPDF, but they allowed the former rebels to keep their LRA rank, and kept them in a separate battalion, which meant they were never really 'part' of the UPDF (Allen and Schomerus, 2006). In future, former rebels should be given the option of joining the UPDF as privates, and gain promotions, as ordinary soldiers do.

The findings of this research also have implications for counter-insurgency measures. It demonstrates that military campaigns are not going to be the most effective means of disrupting the LRA. The LRA is able to respond and adapt to exogenous shocks, as illustrated by their continued survival despite numerous attacks. The research also reveals that the LRA can also adapt to endogenous shocks: they kill many of their own recruits themselves, and moreover, Joseph Kony has executed two of his second-in-commands, which has not had a discernible impact on the ability of the LRA to function, nor on the willingness of other members to continue to fight. Furthermore, several top commanders have been captured, and this too has not impinged the LRA's rampage.

However, this research does reveal that the reasons that abductees do stay are rarely because of loyalty and commitment to the group. Rather, they decide not to leave for fear of the consequences once they are back in their communities. Ultimately, the research demonstrates that there is no strong desire to stay with the LRA amongst abductees, more a fear of leaving, because of the threat of violence or prosecution, and the lack of opportunity that civilian life has to offer.

The Ugandan government has done a lot to try and encourage rebels to return home: the *Amnesty Act* ensures they cannot be prosecuted, there is a reintegration package which helps with the practical challenges of returning, and reception centres offer services and assistance to returnees once they come out. The Ugandan army also drops pictures of returnees into the bush where the LRA are encamped, to prove to current rebels that their former comrades are alive,

and that it is safe to return. The broadcasts by Radio Mega also serve to reassure rebels that they will not be killed if they return. The Ugandan government has treated former commanders who they capture well, in a bid to encourage other commanders to desert, but this has met with limited success.

While current counter-insurgency efforts centre on formal amnesty, and endeavours are made to demonstrate to rebels that the amnesty is real, there needs to be an emphasis on informal amnesty: ensuring that the communities to which the rebels will return will accept them back. This could involve community sensitisation, or a confession component to the amnesty so that it becomes easier for the community to accept the person who may very well have victimised them. The reintegration package provided by the Amnesty Commission serves to create divisions between the returnee and the community, because of the view that the former rebel is receiving underserved financial assistance, while their victims receive nothing (Blattman and Annan, 2008). It is hard to justify giving help to former rebels when the region as a whole has suffered greatly as a result of the war, and civilians have also been denied opportunities for education and gainful employment. Nevertheless, greater efforts need to be made to encourage forced recruits to leave, and instead of offering them financial reintegration packages, they should be offered education and training so that returnees can feel confident that they can legitimately gain the 'success' they had within the LRA: that they can have a life outside of the LRA. The local communities must be included in the decision and planning for these reintegration strategies – while realistically there is not the funding to offer education and training to everyone affected by the war, the local communities can be sensitised to the fact that these strategies are designed to help end the LRA rebellion by bringing rebels out of the bush. Acceptance from the community is a challenge, but it is an important aspect for the rebel who wants to return.

The finding that forced recruits ultimately do not have any real desire to stay with the LRA has important consequences for rebel movements that rely on forced recruitment: while groups may be able to create temporary allegiance to the group, and gain compliance from the people they abduct, they can never gain the enduring commitment to the group that comes with the decision to join

voluntarily. When people are motivated to rise in rebellion of their own free will, they will be committed, and that commitment cannot be created in people who do not join willingly. This is an essential component that counter insurgent efforts need to focus on, as it means that forced recruits, under the right conditions, can be encouraged to leave of their own accord.

The LRA, however, has endured since 1987 despite mass desertion and death: results from the SWAY survey, for example, suggest that as many as four-fifths of abductees do eventually escape (Annan, Blattman and Horton, 2006), while Annan et al. (2008) estimate that 20% of male and 5% of female abductees are dead. Only 1,000 abductees – about 1% - are estimated to still be with the LRA (Blattman and Annan, 2010b). The LRA is able to replace people who leave or die by abducting more recruits, and, as this research demonstrates, is able to encourage some recruits to actively participate. Limiting the available pool of desirable recruits would hamper the LRA's ability to replenish its fighter. The entire civilian population of the regions now affected by the LRA do not need to be protected – as this research, and prior research before, has shown, the LRA specifically seeks young people between the ages of 12 and 15, and so this is the population that specifically needs to be protected. While it is unrealistic to suggest that all youths in this age group could be offered protection in the three countries where the LRA is currently based, military protection could be focused on secondary schools in the vulnerable regions, where there are large numbers of age appropriate people. Furthermore, schools and churches – institutions where this age group are likely to go – could educate youths on spirits and spirit possession, so as to inform vulnerable youths as to the reality of these claims should they ever be abducted. The spirits are a very effective control mechanism within the LRA, and if abductees understand not to fear that the spirits will know if they are planning to escape, the LRA will lose an important means of retaining these recruits. The current efforts that involve reaching out to rebels through the radio and photos dropped into the bush could also focus on disputing the claims that Kony can read minds.

The policy implications for this research focus on limiting the effectiveness of the control mechanisms that the LRA use to retain its recruits, and capitalising

on the inherent desire of forced recruits not to stay, by removing the obstacles that prevent them from leaving, specifically community acceptance and the ability to gain status outside the LRA.

### **11.1.3. DDR Process**

The response to the war has meant that foreign powers become involved in the conflict, most notably through presence of international NGOs, which has become a prominent feature in post-conflict zones. Much has been written about they play in the process of transition, and whether foreign intervention is a help or a hindrance (Branch, 2011; Hoffman, 2004). The role of these NGOs is to facilitate and implement the DDR processes for reintegration. DDR programs usually occur at the end of conflicts, and have been used in Angola, Burundi, Cambodia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Liberia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Tajikistan (Denov, 2010). The purposes of these DDR programs has been to demilitarise combatants, reintegrate them back into their communities, offer them an alternative existence or means of making money to encourage them to lay down their arms, and to reunite them with their families (Boothby, Crawford and Halperin, 2006; Peters, 2004). But DDR programs are also viewed by former combatants as a stigmatising process, where they are identified and labelled as former combatants which in and of itself hinders reintegration (Denov, 2010). These programs often fail to address the causes of the conflict, so offer little in the way of resolution to the issues that brought combatants to arms in the first place (Peters, 2007). More damagingly, the presence of NGOs has been blamed for helping to shape conflicts, because they provide resources for the aggressors (Hoffman, 2004).

The negative feeling towards NGOs in Uganda has been reported - Branch relates that during his research in northern Uganda: "in interviews, many ex-members of the LRA expressed resentment and frustration with NGO projects, sometimes with great vehemence. Many returnees only agreed to be interviewed once they were convinced that my research team and I were not an NGO" (2011, p.136). I experienced a similar resentment and distrust during my fieldwork.

These negative impressions of the NGOs need to be addressed, in order for them to play a meaningful role in the DDR process.

There needs to be an expansive reintegration effort for former combatant – especially for child soldiers – to help them readjust to civilian life. One issue is the international nature of these NGOs, which are viewed as being run and funded by foreigners. Instead, if local NGOs are the ones handling the DDR process, this may help to counteract the distrust and resistance that returnees and the communities feel towards the NGOs.

Another issue is that banding reintegration along with demobilisation and disarmament is problematic, not least because it reinforces the label of being a former combatant. Demobilisation and disarmament are processes that demilitarise the person, and takes away the identity as a soldier. Reintegration focuses on the future, in equipping the person to return to civilian life, and should be handled separately.

How the DDR process has been handled has been in other post-conflict zones has been met with similar challenges. In Sierra Leone, for example, there was a ‘one child, one gun policy’ whereby a former combatant had to hand in a weapon in order to be permitted access to the formal DDR process. This was supposed to limit imposters – an issue in Uganda – but also resulted in the exclusion of genuine combatants (Peters, 2007). The resettlement packages – there were five to choose from - in Sierra Leone were also problematic, as they were seen as not truly providing former combatant with the ability to have a long term job (Peters, 2004).

The role of girls has also been neglected in formal DDR programs, because they generally have been geared towards male combatants (McKay, 2004), and women have different needs to men once demobilised, such as reproductive health issues, and greater problems reintegrating if they have been raped, have children, or have violated traditional gender norms (Veale, 2003). These challenges of formal DDR programs could inform the informal efforts in Uganda.



#### **11.1.4. *Intrastate Conflicts***

The LRA's rebellion – like most modern African conflicts is intrastate, covering four countries as it spread beyond Uganda's borders, as well as the patronage they received initially from Sudan. This is common of wars in Africa – Liberia became involved in Sierra Leone's civil war, and Rhodesia and South Africa supported Renamo in Mozambique. The reasons for this seems to be rooted in self interest, to gain from the rebellion, or protect themselves.

Museveni is reported to have referred the LRA situation to the ICC specifically to mobilise Sudan into stopping its support of the LRA, and to encourage its neighbours to assist in apprehending the rebels (Apuuli, 2008). Thus, an international body – the ICC – also became involved in the conflict. Strengthening mechanisms for conflict resolution regional, and ensuring cooperation between states could prevent the spread of conflict between states, and prevent the contagion of a conflict to other nations.

#### **11.1.5. *International Criminal Court***

With these conflicts comes international justice. The presence of the International Criminal Court in African conflicts has become a source of much contention. There have been about 8,000 allegations before the Court, in 139 different countries, and yet the ICC has chosen to focus on a handful of African cases (Moni, 2012). Four African states have made self-referrals to the Court, but the Court has initiated an investigation in one African state, Kenya, with muted approval, and the Security Council (ICC, 2014). The contention behind Africa viewing the ICC as merely the West imposing their justice is that the origins of these African conflicts are often borne out of colonialism. In Uganda, the ethnic conflict that spawned the LRA was a result of the divides that the British created between the northerners and the southerners; similar divides were created in Sudan by Britain between the Arabs and the Africans (Van Acker, 2004; Sharife, 2009). It was Rwanda's colonial masters – Belgium – that created the ethnic categories of Hutu and Tutsis, and required them to carry the identity cards that were later used to identify the Tutsis by the Hutus to slaughter them (Bostian,

2005). These on going conflicts have also resulted in complex individual histories that lead to the commission of international crimes: Dominic Ongwen, the LRA commander wanted by the ICC was himself a child soldier, and Bosco Ntaganda, the warlord that is being tried for multiple war crime and crimes against humanity in the Congo, is actually a Rwandan Tutsi, who only went to the Congo and joined a rebel group when he was forced to flee the genocide in his homeland. He fought alongside Paul Kagame to end the genocide in Uganda, but is now facing trial at the International Criminal Court for 13 counts of war crimes, including murder, enlistment, conscription and use of child soldiers and pillaging, as well as five counts of crimes against humanity, including rape and sexual slavery. (Baines, 2009; Dale, 15th May 2012). These cases illustrate the structural factors, the politics and histories that have led to the commission of international crimes.

This research has policy implications with regards to the ICC indictments against four of the top commanders. It has already been well documented in previous research that the ICC has been a stumbling block to peace, and it was clear from my research that the ICC is a very real concern for commanders, even those who have not been – and are unlikely ever to be – indicted. This concern come in part because of a lack of understanding of how the ICC operates, and ignorance about the Ugandan government’s disillusionment with the ICC following the indictment of the Kenyan president. The ICC has made it clear that it will not lift the indictments against the four LRA commanders, and it is improbable that they will issue further warrants, especially given its inability to bring these initial four to trial. The Ugandan government, for its part, is still responsible for apprehending the commanders, and may choose not to hand them over to the ICC if they are ever successful in doing so. The government could instead choose to try them domestically, as they did with Thomas Kwoyelo, where, unbeknownst to the LRA commanders I spoke to, the maximum penalty is death by hanging, a punishment that is not available under the Rome Statute. Reassuring the commanders that they will not be indicted by the ICC, or handed over to the ICC, through radio broadcasts or flyers dropped into the bush could help bring them out of the bush. The wisdom of issuing indictments before the

conflict has ended is also brought into question, given the hindrances it has caused in bringing an end to the conflict.

#### **11.1.6. *Peace and Security***

Francis (2006) has argued that African states are cooperating to form unified systems of peace and security. This is important to halt the diffusion of conflicts throughout regions, which is especially true of the LRA, who have taken their rebellion from Uganda to three neighbouring countries. But the endurance of the LRA highlights the lack of unity and cooperation within the region – firstly, with Sudan’s decision to back the LRA, and secondly with the challenges of cooperation in military campaigns on foreign soil, which the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan have been reluctant to allow.

External support of insurgencies has been shown to prolong civil wars (Elbadawi and Sabanis, 2000), and this has been a common feature of many conflicts in recent African history. Foreign powers pursue their own interest by backing another nation’s rebels – whether it be to fight their own rebels, as was the case of Sudan, to benefit from resources in the other country, as was the case of Liberia in Sierra Leone, or simply to protect its own borders, as was the case of Rwanda in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Carayannis, 2003; Hummel, 2007). States are more interested in protecting themselves and forwarding their own agenda than creating peace and security regionally.

Individual sovereignty has always been a stumbling block to unity amongst African states – the issues plaguing the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and, more importantly, its predecessor the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), demonstrate that countries are not willing to give up sovereignty in the interest of regional integration (Gibb, 2007).

## **11.2. Implication for Future Research**

My findings may be unique to the LRA, based upon the particular features of the group, and the cultural conditions that create the definitions of masculinity favourable to soldiering and with a pre-existing belief in spirits. Future research should explore the applicability of these findings to other rebel groups. Recording the stories of more top commanders could shed more light on the mechanisms of control and compliance within the LRA, and other insurgent groups, as well as the spiritual beliefs, although their reluctance to talk to researchers may preclude this.

### **11.2.1. *Revolutionary Movements***

The findings from this research present an insight into the LRA that sets it apart from other revolutionary movements. The LRA does what many other insurgency groups manage to do: turn forced recruits into effective fighters, but its means of doing so are distinct. The LRA does not drug their abductees, as other rebel movements have – for example, in Liberia and Sierra Leone (Gates, 2011), and which has served as an integral means to break down the resistance and inhibitions of its forced recruits (Denov, 2010; Williamson, 2006). There is not the unrestrained violence towards recruits, which has been reported in other groups, nor are women subject to gang rape, or sexual violence outside of the forced marriages (Maclure and Denov, 2006; Peters and Richards, 1998; Wessells, 1997). Instead, there are strict rules that structure life within the LRA.

But it appears that compliance is achieved in both settings, and, some abductees do come to enjoy the violence, and find meaning in it. This has been reported in other rebel groups in Africa - Maclure and Denov (2006) report that abductees in the RUF came to enjoy killing, and the power that it gave to them. The benefits of rank have been described in other contexts, and reflect what my research found, in terms of the power and privileges that accompany advancement. The hierarchal military structure that permits ascent, and with it access to benefits, is based around those of legitimate armies, and provides a clear framework within which abductees can aspire to rise.

The spiritual aspects of the LRA play an important role in binding members to the group, in legitimising Kony's authority and in preventing escape, and are something that has not been reported in other rebellions in recent times. That is not to say that the LRA is unique; quite the contrary, it reflects a phenomenon which has amalgamated traditional religious or spiritual beliefs with a political ideology, and military method, such as the Holy Spirit Movement from which the LRA rose. This synthesis of religion and revolution is prominent in another modern day Ugandan movement, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which is an Islamic rebel group, made up of the fundamentalist Muslim Tabliq sect and remnants of the National Liberation Army of Uganda. It is based in the Itrui region of the Democratic Republic of Congo, near the border with Western Uganda (Hovil and Werker, 2005; Titeca and Vlassenroot, 2012). The group shares many similarities with the LRA, beyond being exiled from their homeland: the ADF also abducts children; it kills deserters, and has also committed atrocities against the civilian population (Scorgie, 2011). The ADF forces its abductees to convert to Islam, and there are daily prayers held, which is similar to the spiritual rituals within the LRA (Titeca and Vlassenroot, 2012). The difference is that the religious appeal for the LRA is limited to the local Acholi who are familiar with these cultural beliefs in the spirits, while the ADF adopt a major monotheistic religion. With its radical Islamic roots, the ADF is part of a larger terror network in East Africa, with links to Al Qaeda and Al Shabaab (Scorgie, 2011). Religious terrorist movements such as these also marry religious goals with violent means, and perhaps in this respect are more relevant as a point of comparison to the LRA, given the importance of the religious ideology within the group. Gunning (2012) argues that there is no real distinction between political and religious violence, because the state has taken over the role that religion used to have in society.

However, the distinction between these groups and the LRA is that they recruit voluntary members; their ideology attracts recruits. Al Shabaab, for example - a Somali ideological group that has been waging war against the transitional government in Somalia – has attracted Diaspora in the US, Canada, Scandinavia and Australia, who have gone to Somalia to train with Al Shabaab

(Shurive, 2012). The group recruits through mosques, which appears to be a common recruiting ground for jihadi movements. The Global Salafi Jihad – another Islamic fundamentalist group – likewise largely recruits young men in mosques who are looking for companionship. The friendship that membership to the movement offered them was what inspired them to join, according to Sageman (2004). He reports that the process of radicalisation “consisting of gradual self-selection, manipulation of resources from above, and recognition of the single common target of the jihad” (Sageman, 2004, p.54). This process has similarities with the LRA initiation, whereby recruits self select in terms of deciding to obey the rules, and surviving, or not, and being killed. The manipulation of the religion exists, and the single common target is the government that Kony seeks to overthrow. Thus, despite the use of forced recruits, the LRA appears to have more to contribute to an understanding of radicalisation and retention in violent religious movements, rather than rebel insurgencies, in terms of the processes whereby the LRA use and reframe conventional Biblical beliefs, and the cultural beliefs in spirits to coerce, control and legitimise their continued fighting.

The marriage of religion and violence in an insurgent group is not new to the LRA: the LRA, in fact, is one of a plethora of violent religious movements that have been spawned in East Africa, and Uganda in particular. While it is beyond the scope of this research to examine the reasons for the propagation of these movements in the region, future research could seek to uncover why religious cults have taken on a bellicose nature, or why insurgent groups have turned to the Bible. This perhaps not unlike Islamic terror groups, in that religion serves as unifying goal for a distinctly unreligious war, and future research could compare and contrast the two.

### **11.2.2. *Charismatic leaders***

This research has implications for the literature on charismatic movements. On the face of it, the LRA appears to be led by a charismatic, Joseph Kony. But my findings reveal a far more complex relationship between Kony and his inferiors than research on other charismatic cults has uncovered. Kony’s soldiers all believe he has powers as a spirit medium: for the top

commanders, Kony is a messiah, who can predict the future, for the lower commanders, he is a mind reader who will know if they plan to escape. But these perceived powers do not create a commitment to the group, nor do they inspire loyalty from amongst the commanders. These beliefs in their leader come from established cultural beliefs in spirits and spirit mediums, but they serve to bind the members to the group not out of submission or loyalty. It serves the top commanders to view Kony as a messiah because it absolves them of responsibility for the crimes they have committed. But even then, they are not entirely loyal to him. All the top commanders that I spoke to had been beaten or imprisoned by Kony because of the threat they posed to his power. He had even executed not one, but two, of his deputies because they were allegedly trying to overthrow him. Kony is not a secure leader. His inner circle do not venerate him as other charismatic leaders – such as Alice Auma – have been, and the reasons the top commanders stay have more to do with self-interest and self-preservation than it does with loyalty to Kony.

Likewise, the lower commanders perceive Kony to have powers, but this does not make them loyal to him – instead, it serves to tie them to the group through fear. The reasons they stay, again, are complex, and motivated by concerns for their safety and survival. By the nature of their recruitment, abductees have never chosen to follow Kony: Kony has not mobilised people to fight on his behalf because of his perceived abilities. Abductees fight for him because they have no other choice, initially, and the spirits that they believe talk through Kony do not make them want to stay, it just stops them from leaving.

According to the current literature on charismatic movements, the leader's charisma is what inspires loyalty to the leader, and creates commitment to the group (Ellis, 1991; Lindholm, 1990; Weber, 1947). While Kony is perceived to have extra-ordinary powers, it binds the recruits to the groups out of coercion and self-serving interests. This suggests that charismatic authority is far more complex than previously documented, or there are more dimensions to authority based upon the perceived qualities of a leader. The research also illuminates the role that these perceived abilities have in exerting power and control over those that believe in them. Further research could look into whether Kony is truly a

charismatic leader, and how charismatic authority works when it inspires fear not loyalty.

The presence of a charismatic leader has been reported to be essential to motivate people to continue to participate. This is true both within religious terrorist movements and other rebel groups. Charismatic leaders have been widely recognised by scholars of terrorism, and are reported as being a central part of the radicalization process (Bartlett and Miller, 2012; Hofmann and Dawson, 2014). Pure charisma, according to Weber (1946), is religious – where the perceived abilities of the leaders are thought to be from God. For ideological groups, then, it follows that the leader's authority is often based upon the perception that their power is divinely inspired. Given the importance placed upon this charismatic authority, interdiction efforts often target the head of the movement on the grounds that it will disrupt the network –without the leader, or at least with proven fallibility of the leader, the movement cannot be sustained. Kony has held on to this position of power since the inception of his rebel movement, but other rebel groups and terrorist movements have lost their leader, and yet it has not brought down the movement. For example, Al Qaeda, Al Shabaab and the ADF have all lost their leaders, only to replace them with another (BBC News, 16th May 2014; Titeca and Vlassenroot, 2012). This calls into question the importance of a charismatic leader maintaining and sustaining ideological based movements.

### **11.2.3. Militarism**

There is great importance placed on a strong military capability within rebel movements, and this has led to many groups replicating the procedures of national armies. Rebel recruits go through a militarisation process, which is design to strip them of their identity and turn them into soldiers (Denov, 2010; Veale and Stavrou, 2003), reflecting the practices used in regular armies.

These groups adopt the same discipline, the same rules and restrictions that create a system of enforcement for rules and orders, and a clear chain of command. The LRA kills deserters; in the RUF, deserters were shot, and there



are some reports of deserters being thrown down a well and drowned (Denov and Gervais, 2007). While this is portrayed as atrocities committed by the rebels, it is in fact in line with how deserters are treated in conventional armies. The Ugandan army shoots deserters; the British have abolished the death penalty, but desertion remains one of the most serious offences under military law. When these violent acts within the illicit groups are understood in relation to conventional military rules, they help to explain the development of enduring military movements, and to understand violence within the group not as mechanism of a violent initiation, or a means to break a forced recruit's spirit, but rather a means of order that is also used in conventional armies.

#### **11.2.4. Women**

This research brought up some interesting findings about the role of women as fighters within a rebel group. There is some prior research on other groups that demonstrate that women were active as soldiers and rebels – such as in the Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF) of Ethiopia, women were respected as fighters, and in Liberia, women chose to fight in the Women's Auxiliary Corps of the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (Utas, 2005; Veale, 2003), but prior research on the LRA particularly has not explored this. Future research should examine women who gained rank in the LRA, to understand more fully their role within the LRA, and armed conflict more generally, and whether advancement in rank within the LRA is gender neutral.

#### **11.2.5. Forced Recruits**

This research also highlights the issue of compliance. The LRA succeeds in procuring compliance from its forced recruits, without the use of irrational violence, drugs or alcohol. My findings are a departure from previous research on the LRA and other rebel groups, which have uniformly argued that a violent initiation is how rebel groups succeed in subduing their forced recruits into submission. Future research could examine how compliance is achieved in other rebel groups or coercive situations, such as hostage taking, without assuming that irrational violence is the answer.

The role of forced recruits sustaining rebel movements is also addressed in this research. Within criminology, research into the recruitment process for illicit groups has emphasised the importance of 'quality' recruits for the successful functioning of the group. Research on illicit groups demonstrates that recruitment in successful groups is based on trust, whereby the group determines the potential recruit's trustworthiness through a screening process (Pizzini-Gambetta and Hamill, 2011). Pre-existing ties such as kinship, ethnicity, family or friendship are also used as a basis for trust in illicit recruitment. Trust has been shown in prior research to be an essential component of longevity for illicit groups, and this is because trustworthy individuals are committed to the group (Decker and Pyrooz, 2011; Seligman, 1997; Von Lampe and Johansen, 2004). Trust ties ensure that the group is resilient for two reasons: it creates redundancy in the network, whereby people are well connected to each other, which makes it less difficult for the group to adapt when a member is removed; secondly, trust means a person is less likely to desert, which is far more harmful to a group than losing a member to death or capture (Aylng, 2009; Everton, 2012). This research challenges these assumptions within the criminology literature, as the LRA recruits based on force, not trust. The findings of this research could be tested in other illicit groups, such as trafficking networks, gangs or organised crime, to determine whether recruitment not based on trust is also effectively utilised in these settings as well.

The findings with regards to allegiance can also be extended to illicit groups beyond insurgents. Within other illegal groups, status and respect may be motivating factors for members to stay with the group. The nature of these groups is that, like insurgent groups, they exist in opposition to the state, which makes leaving difficult, but does not fully explain why members stay. The non-material benefits to participating in illicit groups should be explored further on future research, as they may help explain the risks gang members or drug traffickers take when they choose to continue to participate in these groups, and help formulate policy designed to get them to stop.

This research contributes to two significant areas of civil conflict scholarship. Firstly, it demonstrates that recruitment within rebel groups is not

necessary restricted to committed individuals who will advance the goals of the rebellion. Forced recruits, too, can sustain an insurgency. Secondly, abductees do not just survive in rebel groups, some thrive and succeed in advancing within the ranks to command positions, where they commit the very atrocities of which they were a victim. This research is important because it seeks to understand the concept of social agency of forced recruits. The phenomenon of abductees becoming commanders reflects the growing use of coercion for recruitment in civil conflicts. This research serves to illuminate their role in the survival and endurance of rebel groups that rely on abduction as a means of recruitment.

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## **Appendices**

## Appendix A.

### Interview Schedule

This is a semi-structured interview. Questions may be changed based on the response of the participant.

1. Please tell me about your life from the beginning until we are sitting here today.
2. How did you end up here?
- Early Life
3. What is your earliest memory?
4. What was your childhood like?
5. How would your classmates remember you?
6. Are you still friends with anyone from that time in your life?
7. How would you describe yourself as a child?
- LRA
8. How did you come to be a part of the LRA?
9. What was it like when you joined the LRA?
10. Please tell me about your time with the LRA
11. What is the most memorable experience you have of you time in the LRA?
12. What was a typical day like?
13. How do you feel about the LRA?
14. How do you feel about your time in the LRA?
15. How would you describe your role in the LRA?
16. How do you view your role in the LRA?
17. What does it mean to be part of the LRA?
18. Ho long were you with the LRA?
19. Is there anything that you miss from your life in the LRA?
20. Is there anything that you regret about your time with the LRA?
21. Would you go back?
22. How has being in the LRA changed you?
23. What lessons have you learnt from this time in your life?
24. How do you feel about your time in the LRA?
- Amnesty
25. How did you leave the LRA?
26. What prompted you to return?
27. How did you feel about coming back form the bush?
28. What was it like when you returned?
29. What happened when you returned?
30. Please tell me about your experiences of coming back.
31. How did people react to you?
32. What has been the hardest part of coming back?
33. What has been the easiest?

34. In what ways has your time in the LRA effected your return?
35. What does it mean to be a returnee?
36. How do you view your role in your community?
37. How long have you been back?
38. What do you value about being back in the community?
39. Did you take part in any traditional justice ceremonies?
40. What are your plans for the future?
41. How would you describe yourself?
42. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about that we haven't covered?

## Appendix B.

### REB Approval



OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS

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#### Minimal Risk Approval

**Study Number:** 201251018

**Study Title:** Abduction, Rebellion and Reprieve: The Narratives of Former Members of the Lord's Resistance Army

**Approval Date:** 2013 January 18

**Principal Investigator:** Peel, Diana

**SFU Position:** Graduate Student

**Expiry Date:** 2016 January 18

**Supervisor:** Griffiths, Curt

**Faculty/Department:** Criminology

**Co-Investigators:** none

**Funding Source:** Dean of Graduate Studies

**Grant Title:** Graduate International Travel Research Award

#### Documents Approved in this Application:

- Study Detail, version uploaded: 2012 December 20
- Principal Investigator Response, uploaded: 2013 January 18
- Consent Form, version uploaded: 2012 December 11
- Interview Schedule

I am pleased to inform you that the above referenced study has been approved by the Associate Director, Office of Research Ethics, on behalf of the Research Ethics Board in accordance with University Policy R20.01 (<http://www.sfu.ca/policies/research/r20.01.htm>). The Board reviews and may amend decisions or subsequent amendments made independently by the Associate Director, Director, Chair or Deputy Chair at its regular monthly meeting.

The approval for this protocol expires on the **Expiry Date**, or the term of your appointment/employment/student registration at SFU, whichever comes first. **A progress report must be completed every year prior to the anniversary date of approval. Failure to submit an annual progress report will lead to your study being suspended and potentially terminated.** If you receive any grant for this protocol in addition to any funding listed above, please email [dore@sfu.ca](mailto:dore@sfu.ca) stating the funding source, the term of approval of the funding source and the title of that funding application if it differs from the title of your ethics application. If you intend to continue your protocol to collect data past the term of approval, you must contact the Office of Research Ethics at [dore@sfu.ca](mailto:dore@sfu.ca) and request an extension at least 6 weeks before the expiry date.



OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS

The Office of Research Ethics must be notified of any changes in the approved protocol. If you wish to revise your study in any way, please send an email requesting an amendment addressed to [dore@sfu.ca](mailto:dore@sfu.ca). In all email correspondence relating to this application, please reference the application number shown on this letter, which should be included in square brackets at the beginning of the Subject Line; this will ensure that all correspondence is saved to the electronic study file.

Your application has been categorized as “Minimal Risk”. “Minimal Risk” occurs when potential participants can reasonably be expected to regard the probability and magnitude of possible harms to be no greater than those encountered by the participant in those aspects of his or her everyday life that relate to the research. Please note that it is the responsibility of the researcher, or the responsibility of the Student Supervisor if the researcher is a graduate student or undergraduate student, to maintain written or other forms of documented consent for a period of 1 year after the research has been completed.

The REB assumes that investigators continuously review new information for findings that indicate a change should be made to the study protocol or consent documents and that such changes will be brought to the attention of the ORE in a timely manner.

If there is an adverse event, the principal investigator must notify the Office of Research Ethics within five (5) days. An Adverse Events Form is available electronically by contacting [dore@sfu.ca](mailto:dore@sfu.ca).

All correspondence with regards to this application will be sent to your SFU email address.

Please notify the Office of Research Ethics at [dore@sfu.ca](mailto:dore@sfu.ca) once you have completed the data collection portion of your project so that we can close the file.

**This Notification of Status is your official ethics approval documentation for this project. Please keep this document for reference purposes and acknowledge receipt of this Notification of Status by email to [dore@sfu.ca](mailto:dore@sfu.ca) and include the study number in square brackets as the first item in the Subject Line.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dina Shafey".

Dina Shafey, PhD, MBA  
Associate Director  
Office of Research Ethics

Page 2 of 2

