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Exploring the Reintegration Process for Child Soldiers: A Case Study of
Young Women and their Children in Northern Uganda.

By

Allison Martin
B.H.Sc., University of Western Ontario, 2004

THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of Social Work
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
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2009

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Abstract

Child soldiering has occurred throughout history in the never-ending battle over land, resources and human rights. The earliest mention of minors in war comes from antiquity however it was not until the 1970s that the first international convention came into effect in an attempt to limit the participation of children in armed conflict (Wikipedia, 2009b). Unfortunately, children remain active in armed conflicts around the world as combatants, porters, spies, messengers, sex slaves and human shields. Human Rights Watch (2007) estimates that 200,000 to 300,000 children are currently serving in rebel and government forces in over 20 countries around the world. One of these current conflicts is the civil war, turned regional conflict, between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Ugandan military. This 23 year conflict has received much international attention due to the notoriety of the LRA's brutality against the civilian population and the abduction of children into its ranks as combatants and 'sex slaves'.

With hundreds of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in northern Uganda to assist civilians in general, and former child soldiers in particular, it is amazing to discover the limited impact they are actually having on the situation. Young women returning from the LRA with children appear to be a particularly vulnerable demographic in this context (McKay, 2004). The literature asserts that these individuals face more difficulty upon their return to society and remain invisible in research and practice. As such, this thesis sets out to understand the experiences of these girls and young women within the rebel army as well as upon their return to family and community.

Fourteen participants were interviewed by the researcher with diverse backgrounds including: academics, researchers, child protection workers, and two Ugandans who are of Acholi ethnicity, the primary group targeted and affected by this conflict. An additional thirteen transcripts were provided by another researcher based on interviews she conducted with women who had returned home with children from the LRA.

The major findings and contribution to the literature include the very different experiences of girls and young women based upon where they were taken. Individuals taken to LRA bases in Sudan lead a more normalized existence as compared to girls and young women who remained in Uganda. Many of these individuals return to their communities with skills and strengths that could easily be adapted to benefit the larger society and yet are not being tapped into and utilized. Instead, NGOs continue to employ universal or 'cookie-cutter' approaches which have very limited impact. Reception centres for these children and youth are beneficial in the sense that they provide shelter and cursory attempts at normalizing their behavior. However, these centres, which exist to ease the transition back into society, run the very high risk of doing quite the opposite; of creating dependency and further disempowering members of the community.

This thesis describes the experiences of girls and young women within Acholi culture, within the LRA, and upon return to their families and communities; offers a critical look at NGOs working with these individuals; and provides suggestions and recommendations on how to improve upon successful outcomes for former female child soldiers.

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1.0 Introduction

In a tiny country in east Africa, a dictator sits comfortably in the capital touting his country's successes: one of the world's fastest growing economies in the 1990s and the first country in Africa to introduce universal primary education as well as reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS (Temmerman, 2001; Uganda Rising, 2006). When Yoweri Museveni and the Ugandan government collect and present these successes they consistently ignore the state of northern Uganda, the arena of a 23 year civil war between the government of Uganda and the rebel group, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). As a result of this conflict northerners face a situation where: education is severely limited; civilians are forced to live in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, where over a thousand people were dying every week due to the lack of sanitation, health care and physical protection; an estimated 25, 000 children have been abducted to serve in the rebel movement; over 300,000 civilians have been killed; and the population has lost their ability to sustain themselves and therefore depend on the World Food Program and various NGOs for their very survival (Uganda Rising, 2006).

With increasing international attention being paid to discourses of human rights, especially with regards to women and children, it is discouraging to discover the lack of political will to end the war despite the absurdly large international presence in the country itself. In 2003, the United Nations (U.N.) declared northern Uganda one of the worst humanitarian disasters in the world (Edmondson, 2005; Kisekka-Ntale, 2007; Quaranto, 2006) yet the international community has not been able to persuade Museveni to end the suffering.

Uganda is currently one of 20 countries in which rebel or government forces currently have children within their ranks (Human Rights Watch, 2007). The exceptional notoriety of the Ugandan rebel force, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), stems from the brutality it inflicts on the civilian population and the atrocious induction ceremonies of child soldiers (Vinci, 2007; Vinck, Pam, Stover & Weinstein, 2007; McKay, 2005; Nannyonjo, 2005; Uganda Rising, 2006). For example, in an effort to sever ties to society and desensitize them from suffering, abducted children are often forced to kill family or community members with the threat of death themselves if they do not comply (Machel, 2001; Vinci, 2007; McKay, 2005).

To give the reader a more personal glimpse of the reality that these abducted children and youth face, the following describes the experience of one young woman from northern Uganda:

In May 1995, when Alice was 14 years old, she was abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) together with her sister Joy.... [Within 48 hours Alice's sister tried to escape and] was immediately condemned to death by the commander in charge, tied up and forced to follow the group as they moved to a new location.... 'They [the LRA] then went ahead and asked me whether I would mind if my sister was killed.... Alice was forced by the commanders to watch as three of the new captives came forward and stabbed Joy. She was then given the knife and told to stab her sister until she was dead. Alice recalls the blood and tears of her sister vividly: 'We stabbed [her] until her body was totally shattered.... I had a hand in killing my own sister' (Baines, 2007, pp. 91-92).

The rest of Alice's story as relayed by Baines (2007) involves being taken to Southern Sudan where she was trained as a soldier and subsequently forced to kill civilians. Alice was in

captivity for 16 months during which time she was given to an older man as his wife. When Alice was able to escape during a battle with the Ugandan government she had a short stay at a rehabilitation centre where she discovered that her village had been destroyed and her parents had both died of AIDS. She returned to an internally displaced persons (IDP) Camp, married and now has a child who suffers from epilepsy. The community treats her and her son badly as they believe the son's illness is related to 'cen' which locals believe is the spirit of someone who dies 'badly' taking vengeance on those responsible for the death. The community has destroyed the family's property, insulted, and marginalized them from community activities. The leaders of the camp, including government officials, offer little support because of their own biases and fear of 'cen'. Alice displays signs of psychological trauma which the community recognizes as 'cen': she is seized by fear, finds herself suddenly running, suffers severe nightmares with the sensation of being choked by spirits, screams out during the night and has thoughts of suicidal depression. Alice claimed that "it would have been 'better to have died in the bush than to live like this'" (Baines, 2007, p. 93).

Alice's story highlights the significance of research and practice in the area of reintegration for former child soldiers. Although hundreds of NGOs have operated in the tiny space of northern Uganda the situation for both civilians and former abductees has improved very little. The strategies for (re)integrating child soldiers in northern Uganda have been repeatedly criticized for their lack of success. Programs specifically designed to ease the transition of children and youth from rebel involvement into regular society were failing or, even worse, causing harm.

The literature suggests that young women, especially those returning with children from rebel fathers, experience great hardship upon return to their families and communities. As such, this thesis intends to understand the complexity of relationships and community structures in northern Uganda, and how these processes are negotiated when attempting to (re)integrate young women and their children, returning from the LRA, into society. The following questions will be addressed:

1. Who are the young women and children returning from the LRA in need of (re)integration? This includes examining their needs, concerns, strengths and aspirations.
2. What are the existing relationships and structures within Acholi society? This includes cultural and social norms, religion, distribution of power, and prevailing attitudes regarding these children.
3. What is the current practice of (re)integration? Including actors, barriers, successes, coping strategies and implications of unsuccessful (re)integration.

This paper begins with my own personal journey of involvement and interest for the young women and children of northern Uganda. To facilitate a better understanding of the situation in northern Uganda and the concepts surrounding this study, the next section focuses on situating the conflict for the reader and provides brief descriptions of the concepts that are used throughout this thesis. A review of the literature is then presented followed by the methodology, presentation of findings, discussion and implications.

This thesis reveals facts about the situation faced by young women returning from the LRA that are not present in the literature and it is hoped that the results will be utilized to assist in more responsive and effective program development in northern Uganda.

1.1 My Journey

Why northern Uganda? I first found out about the use of child soldiers in Uganda four years ago when I attended an information session for GuluWalk, an annual international event to raise money and awareness about war affected children in northern Uganda. At this information session I watched a film, *Uganda Rising*, which left a heavy impression upon me, of similar weight as the discovery of the genocide in Rwanda. However, unlike Rwanda where genocide was committed in 100 days, the atrocities in Uganda had been ongoing for 20 years. I was shocked that the government would let this suffering continue for two decades without taking any serious action to end the conflict.

As I do not find myself particularly politically minded, I decided to focus my energy on those children who had suffered the most, the child soldiers who were: abducted, desensitized, forced to kill innocent people and endure disease, illness, rape, being given as a wife, childbirth without medical assistance and starvation. I could not bear to ignore how these children were then feared, distrusted, called names and excluded upon returning to society.

My original intention for the fall of 2008 was to travel to northern Uganda to complete my second MSW practicum at one of two reception centres for former child combatants in Gulu. During this time I had hoped to be able to collect data in the form of interviews with members of the Acholi community as well as young mothers who had returned from the LRA

and their children if at all possible. Due to the volatile situation within northern Uganda and surrounding areas during the summer of 2008, my international practicum was cancelled. In June of 2008 Joseph Kony, the leader of the LRA, refused to sign the third attempt at a peace agreement and there had been reports that the LRA was abducting more children to bulk up the movement, thus becoming an active threat not only to northern Uganda but to the entire region.

As I remain passionate about the topic and the situation continues with little improvement I decided, with help from my thesis committee, to conduct interviews with key informants. Although it was difficult to seek out strong voices on the situation in northern Uganda, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to connect with so many amazing individuals. I still hope to travel to northern Uganda to work with young women and remain confident that an opportunity will present itself when the time is right. After completing this thesis I feel much more prepared to travel, conduct solid research in the area and contribute to the welfare of these young women and children.

1.2 Implications of the research for Social Work

The significance of exploring (re)integration mechanisms for social work practice within Canada is twofold. First of all, understanding the unique circumstances of former child soldiers and members of their communities will help social workers in Canada provide appropriate assistance to refugees and immigrants from war-torn countries. Secondly, international work with community capacity building and peace building will assist social workers in Canada who engage in community practice. Sarri (1997) states four major benefits of studying international

examples of community practice: “greater understanding of alternative economic, political, and social welfare systems; enhanced appreciation for diverse cultures; exposure to comparative options for addressing economic and social issues; and increased possibilities for innovation and change in practice and education” (p. 387).

Social workers engaged in international child protection will benefit from the knowledge of appropriate and successful (re)integration strategies when looking out for the child’s best interest. As well, those engaged in international community development must recognize that effective (re)integration strategies are paramount for building and sustaining peace, an integral component of development in countries experiencing conflict.

2.0 Literature Review

It is imperative to understand the history and social context of northern Uganda in order to fully appreciate the situation facing children returning from the LRA. Most of the literature does not situate the context which, one would assume, is crucial to planning effective programs and services. Therefore, the beginning of this section explains some of the important concepts used in this thesis: child soldier, (re)integration and reception centres. It then provides an overview of colonialism and the history of post-colonial conflict leading up to and including the current civil war with the Lord’s Resistance Army. This leads to the impact of the war on the civilian population, discusses the Amnesty Act and briefly touches on the three failed peace agreements. The section then explores what the literature reveals about life in captivity and moves into a discussion on the criticisms and challenges of current efforts and research aimed at the (re)integration of ‘child soldiers’. The literature falls into three main categories: Western

influence and presence in this process, the benefits and disadvantages of adopting Acholi traditions in this process, and the invisibility of girls and young women throughout this process.

2.1 Grounding of Important Concepts

2.1.1 Child Soldiers

Machel (2001) states that a child soldier is any child under the age of 18 who is compulsorily, forcibly or voluntarily recruited or used in hostilities by armed forces, paramilitaries, civil defence units or other armed groups. In addition to being used as combatants on the front line children are used as messengers, spies, porters, cooks, sexual slaves and wives (Machel, 2001; McKay, 2004).

Although 'sex slave' is a term used throughout the literature to denote the use of girls and women as rewards for commanders, I do not agree with this terminology in the Ugandan context. Sexual slavery conjures images of girls locked in rooms, existing solely for the purpose of sexual gratification. In the Ugandan context girls are forced into a marriage with one commander who provides the necessities of life: shelter, food, clothing, etc. These girls and women raise their children, tend to gardens and have active roles within the army. In addition, these young women do not view themselves as 'sex slaves' which is demeaning and disempowering. Instead of casting themselves as victims, these young women view themselves as wives, mothers and fighters. Throughout this thesis the term 'sex slave' is used only as presented in the literature.

The concept of rape remains controversial and often debated. When is rape, rape? This is a current issue around the world, however more so in Africa and Asia, and specifically in

regards to marital rape. In many of these societies the issue of rape outside of marriage is handled by forcing the perpetrator and victim to marry which serves to somehow legitimize the experience and erase the stigma and dishonour. Marital rape, on the other hand, does not exist in the sense that it is not viewed as rape. In the context of this thesis, the young women who participated in a colleague's research study revealed that they were typically raped once, by their future husband, but that it does not really count as they eventually married. From a Western perspective it is clear that these girls and young women were forced to have sex with their husbands in these forced marriages however, the girls did not view it as such. Therefore, when rape is discussed in this thesis the data is presented simply as the participants explained or divulged it. In this way the women's definition of rape and agency are honoured.

This thesis broadens the category of child soldier to include children 'born in the bush'. Many children are born in the 'bush' with abducted girls as mothers and rebels as fathers. These children have existed in a world solely and uniquely coloured by the ideologies of the LRA and the reinforcement and perpetuation of violence to satisfy one's needs. In addition, this thesis diverges from the terminology found in the literature by referring to child soldiers or abductees as children returning from the LRA, and more specific to this research proposal, girls or young women and their children returning from the LRA. This terminology is much more inclusive and better suited to the children involved in (re)integration mechanisms as not all children are actively fighting with weapons, which is what the term 'child soldier' denotes. Additionally, I believe the change in terminology lessens the adverse emotional reactions elicited in people which lead to greater negative stereotyping such as the belief that all children and youth are dangerous and have completely lost their innocence. A second rephrasing also

needs to be made in this proposal; as children born in the 'bush' have never participated in the wider Acholi society, the term (re)integration is used to account for both those who are being integrated into society for the first time and those children who are being reintegrated into their communities of origin.

2.1.2 (Re)integration

(Re)integration as defined by Machel (2001) involves helping former combatants return to society socially and economically. This broad definition allows for the inclusion of any one or a combination of the following services and supports: clothing, health care, psychosocial counselling, normalizing behaviours with cooking, cleaning, recreation, traditional song and dance, social skill development, and providing opportunities for school or vocational training. Overall, the primary objective of (re)integration is finding family in which to (re)integrate the child (Akello et al., 2006). Although "residing with family in the community" is the accepted definition of (re)integration, it is perhaps too superficial. Recent research emphasizes that this definition is inadequate especially when gauging the successfulness of interventions. There has been a slow move towards redefining (re)integration as necessitating acceptance and having non-discriminatory and equal opportunity to learn, work and live within the community. Also, as the reader will learn later in the findings section, it may not always be advisable to (re)integrate the individual with the family. Alternatives to family arrangements may lead to greater success in some cases.

2.1.3 Reception Centres

Reception centres provide a one-stop shop for (re)integration and rehabilitation needs for children returning from rebel armies. They were initiated by parents who were concerned

about the children returning from the LRA and attempted to address the question “how do we really assist child soldiers so they do not resort to violence?” (Bradbury, 2009).

Although these centres were specifically created to provide a temporary home while efforts at locating family members was undertaken, these children and youth remain for much longer periods of time with the idea that they are being counseled, provided health care and (re)socialized to “bring back structure into their lives and slowly be prepared for normal civilian life” (Peters, 2009). As well, it provides time to work with the family and community prior to the child returning in order to prepare individuals for the changes and difficulties they may experience once the family is (re)united.

2.1.4 Importance of Rehabilitation and (Re)Integration Programs

Rehabilitation and (re)integration programs for children are necessary for the stability of the society and region. Annan, Amuge and Angwaro (2003) reported that during their time with the rebels most children were forced to attack, kill by ambush, burn houses, rape girls and women, and kill friends who had tried to escape. As well, children were often brutally abused themselves. Many children confided that they adjusted to the environment and began committing these acts on their own (Annan et al., 2003). Research suggests that former child soldiers who are not provided assistance with establishing a productive existence within society are at great risk of continuing to engage in conflict within their own country or surrounding countries (Veale & Stavrou, 2007). Annan et al. (2003) commented that:

not feeling part of the community, not having an active role, and feeling alone –
compounded with past traumas – contributes to an individual’s reactions of withdrawal,

idleness, alcoholism, sexual violence and abuse, criminal activity, or even return to the rebel forces (p. 241).

Annan et al. (2003) discovered at the time of their study that 70% of prisoners in the juvenile crime unit in the Gulu District were former child soldiers who had been incarcerated for rape, assault and theft.

Contributing to the problem in northern Uganda is the poverty faced by the vast majority of the population. Betty Bigombe, who was instrumental in the peace agreements between the LRA and government of Uganda, stated:

[the kids] are abducted from abject poverty. Kony takes them out there and makes big promises: we are going to win the war, when we win the war you are going to have properties, you are going to be rich, you are going to have somebody. So immediately this child sees opportunity. [When] they come back that abject poverty is even worse than before they left. Suddenly they cannot have even one meal a day, suddenly what used to be home is no longer home, home is a camp. And not only that, [there is] some element of hostility from the community. So some of these children become very nostalgic about their days in the bush. If nothing is done sooner than later, to start some programs that can get them involved, they could be a huge source of insecurity; they could consider going back (Uganda Rising, 2006).

2.1.5 Traditional Acholi Ceremonies

There are two traditional ceremonies that are used by the Acholi to forgive and pay restitution. The first is a public cleansing ceremony where the person has to step on an egg and pobo (which is a sort of tree that is slippery). The egg is used because it has no mouth and

therefore cannot insult or abuse whereas the pobo is used to wash away any ill feelings (Ojara Ojuk in Uganda Rising, 2006). The individual is now received back home and they feel wanted, “so they will have confidence to talk to the people at home” (Ojara Ojuk in Uganda Rising, 2006).

The second ritual is called Mato Oput and is used for private confession and compensation between the person who killed and a family member of that murdered individual. Ojara Ojuk explains that traditional gifts will be brought by both sides, usually sheep.

[The two animals are brought together] and my sheep will face your side and your sheep will face my side. Then the two will be brought down and cut in half. Your people will take the head of my sheep while I take the head of yours, and the other part of yours you keep and we keep ours. And then some of the intestine will be extracted and put in a local brew called kwete in a big calabash. This calabash must be big enough so two heads can go in because I’ll be kneeling down to represent my people [and you to represent your people] and both of us will be drinking at the same time from the same calabash. And at that time the ladies make the ululation very loudly, everybody will be singing and dancing. That is to ensure that peace has been restored between the two (Ojara Ojuk in Uganda Rising, 2006).

2.2 Grounding of Context

How far back does one travel to explore a current conflict? Perhaps due to the fact that this conflict contains ethnic components it would be helpful to begin with colonialization.

2.2.1 Colonial History

The deep roots of the north-south divide in Uganda can be traced back to the late 1800s during the Imperial Powers' 'scramble for Africa' (Uganda Rising, 2006). Colonialization was motivated by the European hunger for African resources however the process was framed to suggest that Africans were backward and inferior. Therefore, colonizers had the moral obligation to uplift, civilize and educate them. Noam Chomsky states:

the psychology behind it is kind of transparent. When you have your boot on someone's neck and you're crushing them you can't say to yourself, I'm a son of a bitch and I'm doing it for my own benefit, so what you have to do is figure out some way of saying I am doing it for their benefit. And that is a very natural position to take when you're beating somebody with a club (Uganda Rising, 2006).

Finnstrom (2008) writes that on the eve of colonial rule, Acholiland was organized into more than sixty chiefdoms, ruled by chiefs of aristocratic decent. Atkinson (1994) suggests that:

the colonial and post-colonial representatives of ethnic identities in Uganda, however distorted or manipulative, have not been plucked from the air or created out of nothingness. Rather, Acholi collective identity as we know it today was formed from the early eighteenth century onward, when droughts and other processes forced the different groups of peoples in the region that is today's Acholiland to intermingle and cooperate in larger political units than previously. In the process, chiefdoms and a common language developed (Finnstrom, 2008, pp. 52-53).

Although Finnstrom (2008) agrees that the Acholi ethnic group predates colonialization, he states that history forms ethnic identity as identity “is lived, imagined, and politically manipulated” (p. 55). Mahmood Mamdani (Institute of African Studies, Columbia University, quoted in Uganda Rising, 2006) furthers this position by stating that “no colonial power is going to succeed unless it’s going to play on existing divisions and sharpen them, increase them, exacerbate them”. This was accomplished in 1894 when the British Empire imposed an “arbitrary boundary around the many diverse ethnic groups and kingdoms that would make up Uganda” (Uganda Rising, 2006). The southern Bantu speaking people were given economic, political and educational advantage whereas the northern ethnic groups, the Acholi and Langi, formed the military elite (Temmerman, 2001; Uganda Rising, 2006). “By exploiting, linguistic, ethnic and cultural differences between the peoples of the north and south, Britain’s divide and rule policies created a tension between them that helped maintain British rule” (Uganda Rising, 2006). Mahmood Mamdani suggests “one of the first questions after colonialism is, who belongs and who doesn’t? Who was part of the colonial struggle and who betrayed? And this is time to settle scores” (Uganda Rising, 2006).

2.2.2 Post-Colonial Conflict

Uganda gained independence in 1962 at which time the British appointed a southerner as the first President and Milton Obote, a Lango from the north, the Prime Minister. Power sharing ceased in 1966 when Obote deposed of the President and “thousands of his followers were either loaded onto trucks and dumped into the River Nile or buried alive” (Temmerman, 2001, p. vii). In 1971 Idi Amin overthrew Obote and ordered the execution of hundreds of officers for their assumed allegiance to Obote and replaced them with men of his own ethnic

group. His notorious death squads eliminated all opposition resulting in the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of people, many of them Acholi and Langi soldiers, during his eight years of rule (Temmerman, 2001; Uganda Rising, 2006). During this time “Amin’s regime descended Uganda into chaos” (Uganda Rising, 2006) with Amin and his accomplices walking away with 1.5 billion dollars (Temmerman, 2001). It was the Tanzanian military alongside Ugandan rebels, including Museveni, which defeated Amin. Milton Obote was then “returned to power in what Museveni called a rigged election” (Uganda Rising, 2006). Temmerman (2001, p. viii) states that “Obote was returned to power as a wounded buffalo, determined to take revenge on whoever had supported Amin”, and Museveni disappeared into the bush to form the rebel National Resistance Army (NRA) with the aim to “radically change a system of institutional violence which allowed soldiers to loot, rape and wipe out people and villages” (Temmerman, 2001, p. viii; Uganda Rising, 2006). Obote responded to the NRA by “conducting murderous clearing operations” to an estimated toll of 300,000 people (Temmerman, 2001, p. viii). In 1985 Obote was removed by his own army and Tito Okello, an Acholi, took over for six months before being defeated by Museveni (Temmerman, 2001; Uganda Rising, 2006). Although Museveni stated that the NRA was “fighting for the aims of the whole country not for aims of a section of the country... [and that] the NRA [was] a democratic movement” (Museveni quoted in Uganda Rising, 2006) thousands of Acholi and Langi soldiers fled north in 1986 when Museveni’s rebels took power as they feared retributions committed during the civil war (Uganda Rising, 2006).

Micheal Otim (Gulu District NGO Forum) states that “right from independence the leaders did not do enough to unite the people in this country instead [they] exploited these differences for their own personal gains” (Uganda Rising, 2006).

2.2.3 The Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA)

“It is easier to build strong children than repair broken men” – Fredrick Douglass (1818-1895; gifted intellectual; African- American slave who escaped in 1838; Uganda Rising, 2006).

Although the above sections have been thoughtfully included to give the reader a fuller appreciation of the history of the current conflict, Finnstrom (2008) cautions against a simplistic and reductionist understanding of ethnicity as the single cause; he states:

history, belonging, and politics are all issues of contention.... The causes and consequences of the war in northern Uganda, the reasons for it, and facts about it – they all differ, depending on whom you are listening to. There is no one version that is fully agreed upon by all parties involved (p. 8).

The historical roots of the conflict involve ethnic hostilities, colonial-era marginalization of the north, long-term insecurity, exploitation, subjugation, national indifference and troubled politics during the post-independence period (Kisekka-Ntole, 2007; Nannyonjo, 2005).

The conflict officially began in 1986 when the first rebel group, Alice Lakwena’s Holy Spirit Movement, took up arms in opposition to Museveni (Temmerman, 2001; Uganda Rising, 2006). Alice Lakwena, named the witch of the north, was a “charismatic woman who believed she was the reincarnation of the Holy Spirit”; many believe she gave the demoralized Acholi back their pride (Temmerman, 2001, p. 15). Alice wanted to correct the sinful nature of the Acholi and rid them of the evil spirits which were causing their misery (Temmerman, 2001;

Uganda Rising, 2006). As such, alleged witches were killed or abducted and purified, and “violence was justified in the struggle to bring the Acholi people back on the right track” (Temmerman, 2001, p. 109). Alice would prepare her troops by smearing oil on their bodies which “would cause bullets to bounce harmlessly off their chests” and tell them that the “stones they threw at the enemy would explode like grenades” (Temmerman, 2001, p.15). The Holy Spirit Movement would appear on the battlefield armed with branches, trees, and singing hymns which terrified government troops (Betty Bigombe quoted in Uganda Rising, 2006). After some surprising military successes the rebel army was demolished by the NRA in October of 1987.

At this time Joseph Kony and the LRA, who had once been shunned by Alice Lakwena, became the main rebel force by recruiting from the remaining members of the Holy Spirit Movement and channeling Alice’s main spirit (Uganda Rising, 2006). His motivation was to overthrow the Ugandan government and rule the country by the Ten Commandments (Temmerman, 2001; Uganda Rising, 2006). However, Kony was not as popular with the people and resorted to coercion, abduction and terror to build his army (Branch, 2005; Vinci, 2007; Uganda Rising, 2006). Finnstrom (2008) states that rebel fighters have claimed that the LRA “wants to establish a new moral order, with the objective of breaking with the violent post-colonial history of Uganda” (p. 5). Finnstrom (2008) suggests that this perspective provides the LRA with the legitimacy to abduct children and initiate them into this new order while also providing “the motivation to mutilate or even kill people, notably old men and women, who practice ancestral worship or otherwise promote the existing Acholi cosmological order” (Finnstrom, 2007, p. 5). It also somewhat explains why the LRA abducts young girls into the

movement. Temmerman (2001) writes that Kony had sixty-seven wives and preferred young girls as they were free of AIDS. Kony promised to open a school for the hundreds of children who were already born in the camps of Sudan, and the girls were to be their teachers (Temmerman, 2001).

Temmerman (2001) suggests that Kony terrorized the Acholi people because they had become disloyal to him by serving “foreign gods in their country: as teachers, civil servants or refugees, they had entered the government system and sided with the great enemy, Museveni” (p. 155). When the government called upon Acholi civilians to arm themselves and stand up to Kony they were killed or mutilated; “the lips that would betray them were cut off, the ears that would hear their secrets were slashed off and the eyes that could see them were gouged out” (Temmerman, 2001, p. 109).

2.2.4 Social Context and the Impact of the War

The LRA is known internationally as one of the most brutal forces in the world as they engage in mutilation, massacre, rape and child abduction (Human Rights Watch, 2009; Nannyonjo, 2005). However, as the LRA committed horrendous atrocities against the Acholi, the same population suffered continued intimidation and worse by Museveni’s NRA; “according to Amnesty International, in the last months of 1988 government troops forcibly displaced an estimated 100,000 northern civilians from their homes with hundreds executed without trial” (Uganda Rising, 2006). The Ugandan military has been accused of inflicting such inhuman cruelties as beatings, torture, rape and sexual assault, child recruitment and instant execution during detention (Human Rights Watch, 2005; Kisekka-Ntole, 2007; Nannyonjo, 2005). In September of 1996 the Ugandan military began forcefully displacing the Acholi into ‘protected’

internally displaced persons (IDP) camps by bombing and burning down villages (Human Rights Watch, 2005). They then refused to protect the 'protected' camps (Branch, 2005). James Otto from Human Rights Focus comments:

if anything, these camps turned out to be one-stop centres where the rebels could come and do whatever they wanted to do; they could loot property, they could rape women, they could abduct children, they could kill. So the government actually without perhaps desiring it has made the work of the rebels easier (Uganda Rising, 2006).

P.C. (2009) contends that IDP camps are the ultimate proof of Museveni's true intentions. He states that the people were forced to leave their homes and land, walk to IDP camps and forced to build the camps themselves: "5000 or 10, 000 people in one place with no sanitation, no water, no nothing. What do you expect from that type of setting? Death. It is genocide indirect you see" (P.C., 2009). P.C. also maintains that the IDP camps made it much easier for the rebels to kill 200 at once compared to spreading out to attack villages. Quaranto (2006) reported that at the time of his study there were an estimated 1000 deaths every week from disease, malnutrition and attacks (see also Uganda Rising, 2006).

The estimated death toll for this conflict is 300,000 while an estimated 25, 000 children have been abducted (Kisekka-Ntale, 2007; Edmondson, 2005; Human Rights Watch, 2003; Uganda Rising, 2006). The effect of the war and the 1.3 million people living in IDP camps is not surprising. As basic infrastructure does not exist in the areas experiencing the greatest impact of the war, education, health, water, and sanitation are grossly inadequate (Annan, et al., 2003). Nannyonjo (2005) states that displacement and resettlement in IDP camps have caused a degeneration of social values and order resulting in significant behavioural changes such as:

neglected responsibilities, increased crime, high alcohol and drug consumption, lack of respect for traditional values and increasing domestic violence. Erin Baines, of the Liu Institute for Global Studies, suggests that the IDP camps disrupted the gendered division of labour and rendered men voiceless in the political arena. Therefore, men became disempowered; the only way to feel like they have power is through women and children (Erin Baines in *Uganda Rising*, 2006).

In his analysis of the situation faced by Acholi civilians, Branch (2005) states that “LRA violence against the camp inhabitants... (is) designed to prevent political organization against the rebels by the Acholi” (p. 21) and conversely the Ugandan government has used anti-civilian violence “not just to prevent the population from building a political relationship with rebels, but also to prevent the population from organizing to demand an end to the war itself” (p. 20).

2.2.5 Actions and Reactions Over 23 Years of Conflict

“In most wars, propaganda and harsh words almost completely close the avenues of dialogue and mutual understanding” (Finnstrom, 2007, p. 8).

Throughout the conflict there have been many unsuccessful attempts to bring peace to northern Uganda. The first was in 1994 when Betty Bigombe, a Ugandan Minister, began negotiating peace talks between the LRA and Ugandan government. Betty Bigombe tells of her experience of unblinking and unresponsive girls and children, and being surrounded by little boys with machetes in front of older boys with AK47s (*Uganda Rising*, 2006). The first time she met Kony, the group around her began “singing Christian songs [and] some of them were falling down, collapsing like demons were being lifted and taken away... the moment was just like a whirlwind” (*Uganda Rising*, 2006).

The peace talk was strained as Museveni allegedly received intelligence information that Kony was negotiating with the Sudanese government for arms. At the time Sudan was supporting the LRA in response to Museveni's support for Sudanese rebels (Uganda Rising, 2006). Nonetheless, LRA atrocities had stopped and Kony had begun to discuss with Betty Bigombe ways to reintegrate himself and his rebels back into Acholi society. When Bigombe approached Museveni about the negotiated deal the President replied, "no, I am tired of this peace process" (Betty Bigombe, Uganda Rising, 2006). Museveni is presented in Uganda Rising (2006) stating: "I know there are those who think you can talk and the problem just gets solved by talking, unfortunately I don't agree with that. Sometimes you may have to use force to solve the problem". Peace talks collapsed and the LRA moved into Sudan to set up military bases. Believing that the Acholi people were collaborating with Museveni, the LRA began a "campaign of massacre and mutilation against the civilian population" (Uganda Rising, 2006).

Further peace talk attempts were 'thwarted' in 1997 and 2000 (GuluWalk, 2009). Then, with pressure from civil society advocates, the Amnesty Act was implemented in 2000 to promote peace by encouraging Ugandans who were engaged in acts of rebellion against the government to end their fighting (Human Rights Watch, 2005). In order to receive an amnesty certificate one had to report to a local authority, renounce and abandon the rebellion, and surrender all weapons in their possession (Human Rights Watch, 2005). They were then provided with a resettlement package including money, a mattress, a blanket, a hoe and seeds (Human Rights Watch, 2005). In the period from its inception to 2005, 15 000 insurgents had surrendered; however, only 4000 had received the resettlement package (Human Rights Watch, 2005; Nannyonjo, 2005). Although the Amnesty Act was effective in enticing soldiers out of the

rebel force the resettlement packages have created resentment among the civilians who live in absolute poverty resulting in further stigmatization, hostility and theft (Human Rights Watch, 2005).

In 2005 new peace talks under Bigombe were initiated “but hope for peace faded when the LRA claimed a lack of confidence in the process” (GuluWalk, 2009). Later in 2005 the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants against Kony, Vincent Otti (second in command) and three other commanders (Burton, 2009; Human Rights Watch, 2008). They are charged with crimes against humanity and war crimes including murder, rape, sexual slavery and enlisting children as combatants (Burton, 2009; Human Rights Watch, 2008). As the LRA leadership has claimed it will never surrender unless granted immunity from prosecution, the warrants are widely criticized as detrimental to peace efforts. Since the indictments two of the five have been killed, with rumours that Otti was executed by Kony (Burton, 2009; Human Rights Watch, 2008; Lenz, 2009).

In 2006 the Government of South Sudan agreed to mediate and host peace talks between the LRA and the Ugandan government leading to a Cessation of Hostilities agreement in 2007 which brought some calm to northern Uganda (GuluWalk, 2009). However, the final peace agreement, completed in June 2008, has not been signed by Kony as it includes an ICC clause which would necessitate the arrest and criminal trial of the remaining leaders (Burton, 2009; GuluWalk, 2009).

Recently, Human Rights Watch (2009) disclosed that the LRA brutally massacred at least 620 civilians and abducted more than 160 children between December 24, 2008 and January 13, 2009 in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The attacks came after a joint military

operation, involving the Ugandan, Congolese, Southern Sudanese, and Central African Republic armies, attacked the LRA headquarters. Human Rights Watch (2009) states that “in the past, Ugandan army attacks on the LRA have often spurred immediate reprisals on civilians living nearby.... [This] shows the Ugandan army needs to take steps to protect civilians when undertaking offensive military operations”.

2.2.6 Talk of Genocide

The concept of genocide is perhaps the most controversial international debate. Weitz (2003) contends that “the word genocide is a much contested and overused term” (p. 8). Raphael Lemkin invented the word using the Greek ‘genos’, meaning people or nation, and the Latin suffix –cide, meaning murder (Weitz, 2003). The United Nations adopted the term in 1948 with the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Weitz, 2003). The Convention defines genocide as “the intent to destroy ‘in whole or in part’ a population defined by race, nationality, religion or ethnicity” (Weitz, 2003, p. 9). Erin Baines (Liu Institute for Global Issues, quoted in Uganda Rising, 2006) states that genocide does not have to be the blatant murder or physical killing of every last individual in an ethnic group “it is also about stripping away and erasing who they are as a people”.

There is a debate surrounding whether the actions on behalf of the government of Uganda constitute genocide. Uganda Rising (2006) states that “northern Uganda may not look like the 100 days in Rwanda or the gas chambers of Europe but its mix of children, terror, violent religion, poverty and confinement is without parallel”. Scholars and activists state that it is more advantageous to avoid the debate altogether, as the discussion may actually inhibit action. Samantha Powers (Activist and Author, Uganda Rising, 2006) states that “policy makers

have spent almost as much time debating whether or not the word genocide should apply to the horrors as they have debating which tools should be used to stop the horrors. And that is very convenient actually, as it turns out for governments". Mahmood Mamdani (Uganda Rising, 2006) also comments that the effects of politics around naming genocide, or not naming it, retracts attention from the actual situation and focuses it on the debate.

Throughout the 23 years of conflict it is evident that Museveni and the Ugandan government have never been serious about ending the conflict in the north; Museveni has always maintained that he does not negotiate and has never participated in peace talks. There has been continued suspicion surrounding Museveni's motivation as a result of the government's actions of forced displacement, killing, rape, theft, destruction of property, and utter failure to protect civilians against the LRA (Uganda Rising, 2006; P.C., 2009). P.C. (2009) maintains that the IDP camps are "just the government plan to wipe out the Acholi people [from] the face of the earth". In fact, Museveni was quoted as saying that he will put Acholi's in a bottle like a grasshopper; "you see, if you put a grasshopper in a bottle, and I will block that bottle, you will see outside and not be able to get out. You will look for food and not get it, so you start eating yourselves" (Uganda Rising, 2006). Many view this as proof of an agenda to destroy the Acholi ethnic group (M.M., 2009).

Alternatively, Museveni may not actually intend to destroy the Acholi. It may be the simple fact that keeping the Acholi divided, terrorized, without resources and disempowered is beneficial as they are unable to mobilize against the government to demand change for continued oppression and marginalization. It may also simply be that 'when two elephants fight it is the grass that suffers' (Acholi Proverb, P.C., 2009). M.M. (2009) and P.C. (2009) are of

the opinion that prolonging the conflict guarantees foreign aid which usually ends with the government. P.C. (2009) states, "people continue to suffer... the government profits using the name of the Acholi people". Additionally, Burton (2009) suggests that the civil war allows the country to maintain a high defence budget for other military endeavours such as invading the Congo in 1998. As added evidence to prolonging the conflict, Burton (2009) revealed that Museveni failed to catch Kony on more than one occasion and that the army has actually let LRA soldiers go once they were captured.

One could argue as well that the LRA is committing genocide against its own ethnic group, the Acholi. Temmerman (2001) suggests that Kony did not kill;

[instead] he was 'cleansing' his people, so that only the pure ones would remain. And those pure ones were the children born in the camps in Sudan: a new and pure Acholi race that would one day become so numerous and powerful that it would overthrow the government of Uganda, and rule the country according to the Ten Commandments (p. 156).

This would align with similar cases where the same group of individuals were both perpetrator and victim; such as the communist purging in Indonesia and the Khmer Rouge attempt to create a communist state in Cambodia (Weitz, 2003).

Whether or not genocide is technically occurring in northern Uganda is not the focus of this thesis. No matter how the conflict is classified the civilians are suffering tremendously and both the government of Uganda, as well as the international community, must act on ending the now regional conflict.

2.2.7 Living in Captivity, Life with the Rebels:

Stories from returned children in the LRA are horrendous; it is difficult to imagine how children can experience such horror and not succumb to hopelessness but continuously seek out avenues for escape.

All abductees are beaten regularly at the beginning in order to accept their situation and feel responsible for the wellbeing of the other abductees as a deterrent to escape. Those who are caught trying to escape are killed in front of the new children and many times it is the new 'recruits' who are forced to do the killing. This act serves to separate these children from the society in which they were recently forcibly taken. Those who refuse are accused of wanting to escape and will suffer the same fate. The Aboke Girls, a group of schoolgirls abducted from their dormitories, were forced to beat a girl to death with wood on their first night of abduction; "those who did not beat hard enough were slapped and forced to repeat" (Temmerman, 2001, p. 45). Henry, a 16 year old ex-LRA, recalls his first experience with killing upon abduction:

[the LRA Leader shouted] "We are giving you an order now and if you refuse to obey the order we will kill you now". "Get the machete and cut the tree down".... The captured civilians were lined up with their hands bound behind them. I was ordered to beat them all to death.... with the tree. I was fearful for my life. So I beat all of them to death. All seven of them. I was then ordered to lick the blood and brain matter from all the victims. And I did all that (Uganda Rising, 2006).

As an added deterrent to escape children are told that if they succeed they and their families will be hunted and killed by the LRA (Temmerman, 2001).

New 'recruits' had to be anointed in order to be blessed by the Holy Spirit. This involved smearing the sign of a cross on their foreheads, shoulders and chests with oil from the sheanut tree (Temmerman, 2001). Later they would be divided into groups of five or six and assigned to units similar to small families with a commander, his wives and the children recruits. One of the girls in Temmerman (2001) described her experience upon being assigned to a new commander; he told her "if you refuse to work, you'll get a bullet...or shall I teach you how to serve a man?" (p. 36). He went on to tell her how he was abducted eight years before and had adapted and accepted Kony's activities resulting in his promotion to second lieutenant. The only way to survive was to submit to the will of the LRA (Temmerman, 2001).

An egg ritual was performed two weeks after abduction. Recruits had to bathe and then stand bare-chested in a circle divided into 30 squares. A commander would stand in the middle with a raw egg dipped in a brew of ashes and water. He would then draw a picture of a heart on their chests and backs and a cross on their foreheads, shoulders and hands. They are told that this will act as a camouflage which protects them from bullets. If the egg breaks during the ceremony the person being anointed is assumed to be possessed with evil spirits and has to be killed. Also, if the symbols are erased before three days it will be seen as a sign that they are thinking of escaping (Temmerman, 2001).

There are many rules in the LRA based upon what the Holy Spirit tells Kony. They include protection from bullets in battle if brave, "not to cooking from the yaa tree, running rain water on their faces for four minutes, and women on their period not being allowed to cook or share a meal with other rebels" (Temmerman, 2001, p. 51). Additionally, one does not ask questions or show feelings. For the boys who had grown up in the movement violence

became a game; they were eager to kill and torture and encouraged by the commanders to “compete with each other in brutality... the more they abducted and looted and killed, the higher they climbed in rank” (Temmerman, 2001, p. 59).

Some rules were also for the civilian population. As an example of the terror inflicted upon the civilian population and to further emphasize the experiences of these abducted children, Temmerman (2001) describes the actions of the LRA in response to disobedience. There was a rule banning the riding of bicycles and when the rebels came across a man who was riding one, in order to travel to a hospital for treatment on his leg, they ordered another woman who happened down the same road to bite his leg off; if she refused she would be killed (Temmerman, 2001).

2.2.8 Return/Escape

This section is important in order to gain a better understanding of what some children and youth experience as well as their fears upon return to society. Not all children returning to their community or society in general will go through a reception centre. Some children are able to locate their families and slip back into the community without any NGO assistance. However, for those children and youth who are unable to locate their family members due to the mass civilian displacement, or their parents having been killed or succumb to disease, these individuals may travel to a reception centre on their own accord. If a child or youth is captured by the Ugandan military they will always be taken to a reception centre. Additionally, if they escape and ask for assistance from local people, the leader of that community will most likely take them to a reception centre (Temmerman, 2001; Uganda Rising, 2006).

Norman, a youth in Temmerman's (2001) book, describes his experience upon leaving the bush. Norman ran into a few people on the road and demanded to be taken to the local councilor; instead they took him to an IDP camp and handed him to a soldier (Temmerman, 2001). "The refugees gathered around him, studying him and his gun closely. Their eyes were hostile. 'You killed our relatives!' one shouted. 'Let's kill him!' another screamed" (Temmerman, 2001, p. 90). In the barracks he was disarmed and questioned by the commander about the LRA. Two additional boys were brought in, one with a bullet in his arm. Norman "was terrified to go home, to the village where the rebels could trace him; to his parents who had not been able to protect him; to a world that had done nothing, nothing at all for them" (Temmerman, 2001, p. 91).

A staff from GUSCO reception centre described the state of children upon return from the LRA and the unique challenges they experienced:

There were not only the visible wounds: the swollen feet, the scars of bullets and cuts, the mutilations, the skin diseases and germ infections, the malnutrition which had sometimes hampered their growth and development, the back pains from carrying heavy loads, the venereal diseases and pregnancies. Worse and more difficult to heal were the inner scars: the fear and mistrust, the feelings of guilt and self-contempt, and the anger towards a society that had failed to protect them (Temmerman, 2001, p. 107).

Temmerman (2001) highlights the hope these children have at a normal existence, the strength these children and youth find within one another, and the dangers associated with reception centres creating dependency:

The boy was younger than Norman... but he was nice and understanding... and for the first time in two years, he smiled, a roughish, boyish smile. Norman's parents... told him that they were prepared to move to another village so the rebels couldn't find him again. But he didn't trust it. He wanted to stay in the centre as long as possible. Here he felt at home and safe, among all those boys and girls who understood and forgave him without his having to explain anything, the ones he had abducted and the ones who had abducted him, the ones he had beaten and the ones who had beaten him, and those whose relatives he had been forced to kill (pp. 110-111).

The above sections serve to acquaint the reader to the experiences of children within the LRA and the community at large. It is important to highlight the difficulties they experience at these different stages in order to move forward and discuss methods of (re)integration. Although these children and youth have been through horrific experiences it is amazing that they are able to return to their families and communities and become contributing members of their society. The resilience of these individuals is astounding. To aid with their transition from rebel to member of society, reception centres and (re)integration programs began emerging, most if not all, linked to international organizations with the majority run by international 'experts' or expatriates. As was previously mentioned, the international community has experience with post-conflict situations where youth are disenfranchised leading to further instability of the country or region. The international community wants to help make the transition easier for these individuals and families, and the programs and centres were conceptualized with these good intentions.

Unfortunately when one reviews the literature on reception centres and (re)integration programs it is evident that they are not having the intended impact. Much of the literature which follows argues that a majority of (re)integrated children do not remain with their families and communities. How can this be with so many international 'experts' involved and the huge amount of resources poured into such endeavours? Additionally, researchers have discovered that many individuals who would qualify for these programs chose not to register. Although difficult to track these individuals, it appears that they have similar success with (re)integration or in some cases greater success. The next section reviews the critical literature on (re)integration strategies in more detail.

2.3 Themes on (Re)Integration Mechanisms from the Reviewed Literature

There are three major research themes regarding (re)integration strategies. These include: Western influence and presence in providing (re)integration mechanisms; discussions of culture and traditions as either impediments to reintegration processes or strengths in building peace and stability; and the invisibility of girls. What follows is a detailed discussion on each of these themes.

2.3.1 Western Influence and Presence in Providing Reintegration Mechanisms

Most of the existing literature focusing directly upon the (re)integration processes of children in northern Uganda stresses the impact of Western ideology. The Western belief that children are essentially vulnerable promotes the concepts of innocence and victimhood which underlie (re)integration processes (Christensen, 1997). International pressure to accept children's innocence is viewed by Akello et al. (2006) as contributing to the poor success rate of

(re)integration strategies. They state that “the unwillingness of communities to welcome formerly abducted child soldiers, is based on the refusal to accept the idea that such children are not accountable for the crimes they have committed” (p. 235). The concepts of innocence and forgiveness are also described as barriers to successful (re)integration by Veale and Stavrou (2007). They found that:

(re)integration based solely on discourses of peace and forgiveness, without a mechanism for acknowledging identity transitions of returnees, especially for those who were members of the LRA for a long time, may leave them vulnerable to rejection and rerecruitment by armed groups (p. 288).

Additionally, Allen (2005) discovered that people rarely admitted to wanting revenge or recompense while in public, however, in private they admitted that forgiveness with impunity was difficult. The victims of the LRA interviewed by Human Rights Watch (2005) also did not agree with the prospect of leaders being forgiven; they wanted justice and in some cases, retribution. Human Rights Watch (2005) believes there is a discrepancy between the opinions of community leaders, who appeal to cultural values such as forgiveness, and victims on the topics of justice, accountability and reconciliation.

For McKay (2005) the Western ideology of girls being victims and lacking agency in the conflict inhibits girls/young women from receiving necessary assistance. She states that “despite recent and increasingly robust data detailing girls in fighting forces, the international community, governments, and militaries continue to ignore and deny the extent of girls’ involvement and offer inaccurate and reductionist explanations for their presence” (p. 393). When girls are included in rehabilitation and (re)integration programs, McKay states that

Western-style individualistic approaches are usually inappropriate as community is a central concept to promoting health and well-being.

Many NGOs view art therapy as providing the child or youth an alternate avenue for expressing their experiences and feelings as many collectivist societies tend to discourage their members from revealing problems with actors outside of the community. Edmonson (2005) however critically states that art therapy used by one international NGO was not used as a personal expression of trauma and healing, but as a means to market trauma in order to attract the attention of the Western world and ensure the organization's self-sustainability. As a result of this international marketing, children were encouraged to suppress their own unique stories, strengths and coping mechanisms. The Western discourse of forgiveness was highlighted in a quote by a former captive: "Sometimes they say 'forget your past' It is important to remember [these] times, the times that made you strong. Like me, I remember what is most important, my strength that kept me alive" (Edmondson, 2005, p. 469).

In an article describing their experiences of counselling in northern Uganda, Annan et al. (2003) expressed the difficulties of integrating "their Western-based training with their own culture, its values, beliefs and ways of healing" (p. 238). Although the authors highlighted the underlying assumption that individuals and collectives have their own resources "that they can draw on for survival, recovery, and development" (p. 238), the authors still neglected the strengths and capacities of the children they counselled.

2.3.2 Acholi Culture and Traditions

Veale and Dona (2003) studied street children in post-genocide Rwanda and discovered that "lack of identification with and trust in the community might be one psychological factor

contributing to why some adolescents may not be interested to stay in, or return to their community of origin" (p. 256). This may have implications for northern Uganda as Akello et al. (2006) found that three months after 300 child soldiers were (re)integrated none of them were still residing within their communities. Murithi (2002) discussed the need to rebuild social trust in northern Uganda in order to promote peace. He highlights the fact that intrastate conflicts "divide the state's population by undermining interpersonal and social trust, consequently destroying the mechanisms that have promoted collective action for the community's well-being" (pp. 291-292). The civilians of northern Uganda are divided by their different loyalties, as some want peace offered by the government and others want justice offered by the rebels (Branch, 2005; Murithi, 2002). Murithi (2002) goes on to promote the Acholi's own reconciliation mechanism, the Mato Oput, as a way to provide conflict resolution and build social trust. Akello et al. (2006) and Veale and Stavrou (2007) also recommend the Mato Oput be utilized to publicly recognize wrongdoing, as the community is unable to forgive and forget the atrocities the rebels have inflicted upon them.

Other research suggests that using traditional reconciliation mechanisms may be complicated by post-traumatic stress and depression (Vinck et al., 2007). The authors discovered that respondents reporting symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression were more likely to favour violent over non-violent means to end the conflict, an obvious implication for peace building (Vinck et al., 2007). This study however used Western psychological measures that may not be applicable to the Acholi population in northern Uganda. The authors note that "local cultures, beliefs and social factors may play a role in

shaping attitudes and opinions toward peace and point to the need to consider such factors in policy making” (Vinck et al., 2007, p. 552).

Other researchers have examined the discrepancy between the perceptions of children and the community in regards to the (re)integration process. Rodriguez, Smith-Derksen and Akera (2002) found that “there is clearly a difference between how the community perceived how they are welcoming returnees and how returnees feel they are being welcomed” (p. 17). Veale and Stavrou (2007) state that “while returnees are accepted back, many also experience a silencing and disenfranchisement” (p. 288). In addition, they state: “There were few roles and practices that the formerly abducted youth could engage in on return that would facilitate transition from a returnee/novice through to being a full participant in an economic and community system” (p. 289). This underscores the importance of researchers and NGOs distinguishing between physically (re)integrating someone into a community and having that person accepted as a participating member of that community.

Another complicating factor is that children often occupy multiple social identities within their community: son/daughter, survivor and rebel (Veale & Stavrou; 2007). In an adult focus group, parents expressed their happiness of having their child back but also their fear that their child would be re-abducted, that the child was not settled in his or her mind, or that he or she would be rude, ill-tempered or fight at any provocation (Veale & Stavrou, 2007). There is merit to these fears as documented by Annan et al. (2003) who led focus groups in which youth confided that they still desired to rape, kill and return to the rebels where they could get what they wanted when they wanted it. In addition, they expressed hatred towards youth who had not been abducted and intended on getting revenge by spreading HIV/AIDS, as they themselves

had been forced to contract it (Annan et al. 2003). The good news is that with counselling, these youth were able to identify with their victims and were empowered to make conscious decisions instead of reacting with violence (Annan et al., 2003).

In their article Annan et al. (2003) also disclose the difficulties in working within Acholi cultural norms. For example, the authors note that “women are not to express their feelings, an outsider should not involve him/herself in another family’s affairs, a younger person should not counsel an older person, and a woman should not counsel a man” (Annan et al., 2003, p. 244). Another significant barrier to (re)integration mechanisms within Acholi society is their belief in ‘cen’, which is described as a spirit suffering a wrongful death which haunts the wrongdoer by entering their mind or body in the form of visions or nightmares resulting in mental illness and sickness until the wrong is made right (Akello et al., 2006). ‘Cen’ not only affects the individual but anyone who comes near it through illness, misery and mysterious deaths (Akello et al., 2006). This has important implications as family and community members reject children who are experiencing symptoms of ‘cen’. Akello et al. (2006) suggest symptoms of ‘cen’ are actually the result of a second traumatization from systemic exclusion and communal isolation. Unfortunately, some children experiencing ‘cen’ sometimes rejoin the rebels where they are socially included, resulting in the disappearance of the symptoms of ‘cen’ (Akello et al., 2006). This is a great example of why Westernized approaches to (re)integration may not succeed.

2.3.3 Invisibility of Girls

McKay (2004) states that between 1990 and 2003, girls were part of fighting forces in 55 countries throughout the world and involved in armed conflicts in 38 countries experiencing

civil war. Although global in occurrence, “girls’ experiences are poorly understood and only occasionally acknowledged... (and their) efficacy, actions, resistance, and survival skills within fighting forces are inadequately appreciated” (McKay, 2005, p. 386). Additionally, “the phenomenon of young mothers, or girls who are pregnant, returning from armed groups remains largely unacknowledged.... [Although] sometimes termed ‘the most’ or ‘particularly’ vulnerable of all returnees [they] do not benefit from formal disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) assistance” (McKay, Robinson, Gonsalves & Worthen, 2006, p.1). Burman and McKay (2007) confirm that girls in fighting forces, particularly those who return with children born through forced sex, remain a highly marginalized group receiving little attention during or after conflict. Most girls, if they survive, make their way directly back to communities where they are often stigmatized and/or provoked (Burman & McKay, 2007).

Additional gendered challenges complicate the (re)integration of girl mothers who experience enormous challenges to physical and psychosocial recovery as their bodies and minds are not prepared for motherhood (McKay, 2004). Further complications include the “involvement or non-involvement of their bush husband and changes in relationships within the larger kinship group” (McKay et al., 2006, p.2). McKay et al. (2006) reveal that community judgment, stigmatization and social distancing occur upon return, “especially when their bush husbands continue to be part of their lives” (p. 2).

McKay et al. (2006) summarized findings after speaking to 317 girl mothers in IDP camps in Uganda; they state “these girls had expected to receive help in learning how to care for their children, to be cared for medically and to be told how to get along with their community who now treats them aggressively. Unfortunately these expectations were not realized” (p. 3).

Upon return to their communities these girls report being treated as 'second hand citizens'; without value first by their abductors and then by their communities (McKay et al., 2006). They were "frequently rejected or criticized by their parents and other relatives; received little help with child care; were often required to provide for themselves and their children; and were consequently exposed to sexual exploitation" (McKay et al. 2006, p. 6). McKay (2004) states that some "parents react with fear thinking their daughters will kill them...they are considered 'spoiled goods' and are targeted for sexual assault by male members of the community and sometimes forced to marry the perpetrator" (p. 25).

As girls have profoundly violated gendered norms of behaviour they experience additional hostility on behalf of the community and are subject to provocation, stigmatization and rejection (McKay, 2005). Girls who return with children from rebel fathers are further stigmatized as they have violated a traditional gender norm mandating girls to be virgins when they marry (McKay, 2005). These girls and their children are also viewed as having direct links to the killers (Akello et al., 2006). Additionally, the presence of children causes further stigmatization as the child has unknown paternity or is viewed as a 'rebel baby' (Carpenter, 2000; McKay & Mazurana, 2004). At the same time, community members may also feel shame due to their inability to protect girls from these violations (McKay & Mazurana, 2004).

In addition to the challenges described above, many girls on the frontline experience an identity transformation from being a victim of abduction to having a sense of power, status and control, and feeling pride, self-confidence and a sense of belonging (McKay, 2005). As well, girls may seriously deviate from norms of behaviour due to their learned survival skills: they may be aggressive and quarrelsome, use offensive language, abuse drugs, smoke, and kill and eat other

people's animals (McKay, 2004). As a consequence, girls are often forced to leave their communities as they are poorly accepted, unable to adjust, cannot marry, or are unable to secure economic livelihood (McKay, 2005). These girls are at increased risk of forced prostitution, sexual assault and/or sexually transmitted diseases (McKay, 2004).

McKay (2004) discusses how only 8% of the total number of people receiving DDR benefits in Sierra Leone were girls; "the majority went directly back to their communities, a move referred to as 'spontaneous reintegration', or they were taken in by friends, relatives or helpful adults" (p. 23). McKay (2004) attributes this to a "gender-discriminatory framework which saw girls and women only as 'sex slaves', 'wives' and 'camp followers'; they were therefore not viewed as appropriate recipients of DDR benefits, such as skills training or schooling" (p. 23). Therefore, the idea that girls are simply victims, while ignoring their agency within the fighting force, has excluded them from (re)integration programs which include rehabilitation in addition to skills training and schooling (McKay, 2005). This process reinforces sexism which privileges boys and men (McKay et al., 2006), and one could extrapolate, further perpetuates gendered poverty.

In addition to sexism and policy priorities emphasizing the giving up of guns to qualify for help, other factors decreasing the visibility of girls and young women include social and cultural attitudes towards girl soldiers and girl mothers as well as the attitudes and aspirations of the girls themselves (McKay et al., 2006).

2.3.4 Summary of and Gaps in Literature

First of all, the literature suggests that Western ideology and presence in the (re)integration process may be a hindrance as there is little buy-in from communities for

programs that are not culturally appropriate. Many authors recommend studying the context in which children are being (re)integrated into; Veale and Dona (2003) write: “the question that automatically suggests itself is ‘reunification’ with whom, and ‘social reintegration’ to what structures?” (p. 266). These questions need to be answered if (re)integration strategies are to be successful.

Secondly, the literature highlights the lack of participation of children and the community in the (re)integration process. Akello et al. (2006) state that “ex-combatant children are usually not asked about their own perception of their past and their wishes regarding reintegration” (p. 240), and that programs are implemented in a top-down manner. Additionally, programs and research tend to focus on children’s weaknesses instead of building upon their strengths and resilience.

The most glaring gap in the literature is the lack of research on and programs for girls, particularly child mothers and their children (Akello et al., 2006; McKay, 2005; Veale and Dona, 2003; Veale and Stavrou, 2007). This thesis intends to address these gaps by specifically researching the experiences, needs and strengths of young women who have returned to Gulu with children born from rebel fathers in addition to the social and cultural context of (re)integration.

3.0 Paradigms and Theoretical Frameworks

3.1 Naturalist/Interpretive Paradigm

The purpose of this thesis is to understand and attempt to explain how young women and their children from rebel fathers are accepted back into their families, communities and society as a whole in northern Uganda. What are the unique challenges faced by these individuals; what is the current process of reuniting these children and young adults to their families and communities; and how can the process be strengthened given the literature describing the failure of these reunions. Due to the complexity of the situation in northern Uganda it is imperative to understand both how children are being (re)integrated and what exactly they are being (re)integrated into; the existing societal structures. As such it will be guided by the naturalist paradigm. The core principle of naturalism is that reality is multiple, constructed and holistic (Westhues, Cadell, Karabanow, Maxwell and Sanchez, 1999). In order to understand a complex phenomenon it is essential to engage all those who are involved. My personal values correspond well with the naturalist paradigm which emphasizes sensitivity, respect and appreciation for the real world (Matza, 1969; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

3.2 Critical Paradigm

It is simply not enough to understand and describe what is happening to young women and their children in northern Uganda. While my original intention had been to use social ecology theory to understand the structure of society in northern Uganda, I cannot ignore the existing social system which oppresses people from the north, especially women.

The critical perspective intends some form of individual, community or societal/structural action. The central tenets of a critical philosophy according to Westhues et al. (1999) include:

1. Virtual reality is socially constructed and fixed within and through existing social, economic, cultural and political structures and values;
2. The researcher strives for equality, mutual learning and shared responsibility;
3. Hypotheses are time and context bound with sensitivity to issues of power and social control;
4. The aims are to critique and transform oppressive reality, provide restitution and emancipation, and lessen ignorance to stimulate action; and
5. Humans are creative, adaptive, have unrealized potential, and are trapped by illusion and exploitation.

Post-colonial conflict has perpetuated the notion that the Acholi are fighters and continue to threaten the government. This provides further ammunition for the government to continue to oppress and terrorize the people of the north. The people are disempowered; they cannot envision peace and are afraid to let themselves hope for a peaceful and prosperous future. This population has been classified, nationally and internationally, as helpless. Many NGOs coming to their rescue have created further dependency and contributed to the process of disempowerment. Therefore, it is imperative to take a more critical look at the various actors in northern Uganda as well as the environment into which these young women and children are being (re)integrated.

3.3 Ecological Theory

Social ecology theory emphasizes the interactions and transactions between people and their environment in order to foster healthy interdependency between the two elements (Ungar, 2002). The aim is to assess the resources and opportunities an environment provides for the safety, growth, development and health of individuals and families (Saleebey, 2001). Weil (2005) suggests the theory describes structures and their functions while examining the processes within and between structures and boundaries with the primary objective of understanding stability.

As environment exerts a very strong influence on the individual and vice versa, it is important to understand the type of influence exerted on these young women and children when they return. This involves an understanding of the experiences, perspectives and assets of the individual, family and community, as well as the political nature of the environment. Microsystem factors which may impact (re)integration include: individual characteristics of the child/youth and family, siblings, and peers (former child soldiers and non-abducted but still war-affected), elders, leaders, etc. Important ecosystem factors could include: the community, local or indigenous support and services, culture, tradition, religion, IDP camps, NGOs, and international support and services. Macrosystem influences may include: tribe, politics, the LRA, government, international community, and national as well as international economics.

Although a central tenet and criticism of ecological theory is adaptation to one's environment, and by default promoting the status quo, Weil (2005) suggests that theories focusing on stability and centrality are important in many community practice situations; she writes, "achieving sufficient stability and sense of membership is necessary for a community to

act on its own behalf” (p. 93). Promoting stability within the community through leadership and capacity building is essential if children are to be granted acceptance and access to the opportunities that exist for other community members. These children must be given the opportunity to grow and learn like any other child, as well as the opportunity to demonstrate the capacity to actively contribute to the well-being of the community. Overall, it is imperative to understand how each system, and the factors contained within those systems, enhance or inhibit (re)integration success.

3.4 Empowerment Theory

Empowerment means different things to different people. In its simplest form, empowerment is defined by Minkler (1989) as the process by which individuals and communities gain mastery over their lives. Rappaport (1987) uses a similar definition while adding democratic participation in the life of their community and a critical understanding of their environment. Empowerment links individual strengths and competencies, natural helping systems and proactive behaviours to social policy and social change (Rappaport, 1981). The Cornell Empowerment Group (1989) states that empowerment is an intentional, ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources. Wallerstein (1992) would add that the goals of empowerment would be increased individual and community control, political efficacy, improved quality of community life and social justice.

One of the most important gaps in the literature is the strengths and skills associated with children returning from the LRA. Empowerment theory compels researchers to think in

terms of wellness versus illness, competence versus deficits, and strength versus weaknesses (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Empowerment research focuses on identifying capabilities instead of cataloguing risk factors, and exploring environmental influences of social problems instead of blaming victims (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

Empowerment research and processes are lacking in northern Uganda. From the literature it is evident that the international community has been focused on providing services and support to returned children/youth and affected civilians, rather than strengthening existing services and supports that will be sustainable once the mandates of the NGOs are fulfilled.

3.5 Ecological and Empowerment Theories Working Together

The ongoing conflict has created a sense of powerlessness causing the population to feel a lack of self-worth, engage in self-blame, feel unable to act for oneself, and increasingly depend on services. Empowerment is desperately needed in northern Uganda on every level mentioned in ecological theory. Individuals need to be empowered to make the decisions which impact their lives. However, this in isolation would prove useless unless other levels of influence are also taken into consideration. Families and communities must also be empowered to take more responsibility for these women and children and provide opportunities for active participation. Parents, siblings and the community in general may feel disempowered due to the fact that they failed to protect these children in the first place. Additionally, every time northerners have attempted to stand up for themselves, against government forces and the rebels, they have been punished for attempting to take this control. This punishment, compounded by the loss of their homes and herding into IDP camps, has

created a society that is devastatingly disempowered. Finally, the government must provide the opportunity for northerners to have a voice and agency not only in their communities but also on the national stage.

4.0 Methodology

4.1 Qualitative Research

Qualitative methodologies provide the phenomenon under study a context in which complex processes and subtle dynamics can emerge (Westhues et al., 1999). This thesis attempts to understand the relationships and structures that exist in a culture very different from the researcher. This can only be accomplished if participants are provided a venue to fully express themselves without researcher constraints in the form of restricting questions.

4.2 Research Design

This qualitative thesis utilized a case study approach. Punch (2005) states that a case study “aims to understand the case in depth, and in its natural setting, recognizing its complexity and its context. It also has a holistic focus, aiming to preserve and understand the wholeness and unity of the case” (p. 144). The objectives of the research correlate nicely with the aim of a case study as it seeks to explain the civil war and situate the population under study in the appropriate context. The focus of this research is to glean a holistic understanding of the mechanisms in place to assist children and youth transform from members of a rebel movement to members of their or their parent’s community while stressing an understanding of the culture and traditions of the Acholi. The goal of this research is to assist policy and program developers create responsive programs and processes as well as increase successful

outcomes for these individuals, families and communities. Although this is an intrinsic case study with unique circumstances such as culture, the length and brutality of the conflict, displacement, and societal breakdown there are some findings that will transcend the specific context of northern Uganda. Therefore, it is hoped that this research will assist those working with young women and children returning from any rebel force. The participants of this thesis are involved with children in armed conflict on many different levels. Most of the participants, as well as those who were contacted but were unable to participate, requested a copy of the final thesis. I would also like to offer copies of the thesis to the organization in which I intended to do an international practicum, Gulu Support the Children Organization (GUSCO), as well as other NGOs in northern Uganda. I have a close friend who established his own NGO in northern Uganda, with a focus on empowering women, who has requested a copy of the thesis. Through these avenues it is hoped that the findings will be disseminated to those who are working on the ground with these individuals.

4.3 Surveys and Interviews

A semi-structured interview guide was created for key informants in order to guide the direction of the conversation to questions and topics important for this thesis but did not provide too much structure as to constrain knowledge and insight that these individuals possessed. As I do not have experience working in Uganda or with former 'child soldiers' this was a very important consideration as I could have asked questions that would not lead to a holistic understanding. I was able to glean important information from those instances where the participant went slightly off-topic. Please refer to the attachments for the interview guide.

Participants were chosen and contacted based on their experience working with child soldiers in some capacity or context, those engaged in other types of research or work in Uganda, and those who had intimate knowledge of Acholi culture and traditions.

A few names were initially provided by my thesis committee and I began the process of contacting them via email. The email explained who I was and how I attained their contact information, described my research and why I thought they would make an excellent participant, formally requested their participation, and ended with a request for additional contacts. Not everyone contacted participated as they did not think they had enough knowledge to share or they were too busy. Originally I was skeptical with snowball sampling thinking I would only secure a handful of participants. However, 95% of those I contacted provided further sources and soon those few individuals with whom I connected turned into many as snowball sampling picked up momentum. Overall, I am very pleased with the diversity of backgrounds, experiences and expertise brought to this thesis; many different perspectives were shared. Please see the detailed description of the participants which follows below.

The majority of the interviews were conducted over the telephone using the speaker phone function which allowed the conversation to be tape recorded or freeing the researcher's hands to take handwritten notes. One interview was conducted over the computer and four others were conducted in-person. The majority of the interviews were tape-recorded with participant consent or, for those interviews that were not recorded, the researcher took detailed notes.

Although I intended to give participants compensation, in the form of a \$15 gift certificate to Williams Coffee Pub, only three accepted with pressure. I was told repeatedly that “this is how it works in the research world”. I hope one day I can return the favour.

4.4 Brief Introduction to the Participants

Elaine Bainard: Canadian social worker with experience working in Sri Lanka with child soldiers. Her data focused mainly on how they (re)integrated the children and the differences between Sri Lanka and the conflicts in Africa. Personal interview conducted on July 16, 2008.

Adrian Bradbury: Co-founder and leader for Athletes for Africa (since 2004) and GuluWalk (since 2005). Adrian recently co-authored a book entitled: ‘When Elephants Fight: The Lives of Children in Conflict in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Uganda. Telephone interview conducted on September 26, 2008.

Bryan Burton: Canada's sole diplomatic representative resident in Kampala from August 2006 until August 2008. He was closely involved in the Juba Peace Process, including as an official international observer to the peace talks in Juba. Mr. Burton's assignment in Uganda was at the end of his almost 36 years as a member of Canada's Foreign Service. He now is retired in Ottawa. Public speaking engagement on October 6, 2008 with personal interviews/discussions on October 6 & 7, 2008.

Lucy de los Reyes: Recently completed her Master's degree in International Humanitarian Action at Universidad de Deusto in Spain. Her thesis was on the needs of young women returning from the LRA with children, back into their families and communities. Lucy travelled to northern Uganda and resided in Patongo IDP camp where she interviewed 13

women. Lucy shared her data for use in this thesis. Telephone interview on November 16, 2008.

Guillaume Landry: Canadian researcher and child protection expert. He is currently Programme Manager for the Country Profiles Initiative at the International Bureau of Children's Rights and the Coordinator of the Canadian Forum on Children and Armed Conflict. Telephone interview conducted November 3, 2008.

Jessica Lenz: International Child Protection Specialist and founder of Creative Empowerment, a consultancy firm working with non-profits, governments, and the UN providing technical support in the area of child protection for children in emergencies and/or conflict situations around the world. She has over 11 years of field-based experience that has also contributed to substantial work in advocacy for the change of policies and the creation of standards and guidelines for the protection of children around the world. Lenz is currently working on a book entitled, *Armed with Resilience*, which focuses on the strengths and skills of female child soldiers in northern Uganda. The book challenges current rehabilitative/reintegration programs for child soldiers and argues that current practices undermine children's true resilience and create dependency, low self-esteem, and fail to tap into positive contributions these children could provide to communities and their societies at large. Lenz is also the founder of the award-winning community-based organization in Uganda known as Empowering Hands. Empowering Hands won the Glamour Women of the Year award in 2007 for its work in community-based reintegration programs for child soldiers. The leadership and composition of the organization is run by female child soldiers and other females affected by the conflict in northern Uganda. Although Lenz has a passion for Uganda, she has worked

around the globe including many parts of Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Middle East. Telephone interviews conducted on January 15 and 19, 2009.

Marcia Oliver: Currently completing her Ph.D. in sociology at York University, Toronto. In exploring the intersections of economic and sexual justice in the context of U.S. funded HIV/AIDS development projects in Kampala, Uganda, her dissertation aims to disrupt the many abstract liberal dualisms framing women's subjectivity, sexuality and agency (e.g. determinism/voluntarism, victim/agent, risk/pleasure, social/individual bodies). Telephone interview conducted on September 24, 2008.

Krijn Peters: Lecturer and Head of Teaching, Centre for Development Studies, Swansea University, UK. Main research interests are in: armed conflict and development; disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants and post-war reconstruction; and rural development in West-Africa. He has considerable experience in consultancy and advisory work with a range of organisations in the UK, the Netherlands and abroad including the World Bank, European Union, Royal Institute of the Tropics, Special Court for Sierra Leone and NGOs. His consultancy work has focused on child and youthful soldiers and post-war reintegration trajectories, evaluations of Interim Care Centres for under-age ex-combatants, and war-crimes and crimes against humanity. Telephone interview conducted on August 19, 2008.

Mareike Schomerus: Graduate student in the Development Studies Institute at the London School of Economics. Faculty Advisor Tim Allen. Co-author of "A Hard Homecoming: Lessons Learned from the Reception Center Process in Northern Uganda (2006), prepared for review by the United States Agency for International Development and the United Nations Children's Fund. Interview conducted over the computer (Skype) on September 26, 2008.

Afua Twum-Danso: Lecturer in the Sociology of Childhood at the University of Sheffield, UK. Her recently completed PhD thesis from the University of Birmingham, UK, is entitled *Searching for a Middleground in Children's Rights: the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Ghana*. The aim of the thesis was to move beyond the binary debate relating to the universality and relativity of children's rights and engage with children's local realities, which illustrate that there is, indeed, a middle ground in which people live their lives that may facilitate dialogue on children's rights with local communities. Telephone interview conducted on September 21, 2008.

A.P.: Associate Professor at a Canadian University. A.P.'s interests are: peacebuilding, post-conflict transitional justice, war criminology, restorative justice, and childhood. Using post-conflict Sierra Leone as a case study, A.P. studies the possibilities for restorative approaches to transitional justice. In addition, A.P. examines rule of law institutions, access to justice, institutions of democracy, economic/distributive justice, and the need for international interveners to work with local populations to make transitional efforts culturally meaningful. Unfortunately, A.P. was unable to read through the findings sections to ensure quotations and referenced materials were accurate. As such it was decided that A.P. would remain anonymous. Telephone interview conducted on August 25, 2008.

T.R.: Assistant Professor at a Canadian University. T.R. specializes in post-conflict transitions, transitional justice and comparative conflict analysis, with specialization in Africa. T.R.'s PhD research examined how Sierra Leoneans reconciled and built trust after the civil war from 1991-2002 which involved following the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. T.R.'s previous research looked at post-war education challenging ethnic

chauvinisms in Bosnia and Croatia. Currently, T.R. is writing on restorative justice after mass violence and on the impact of conflict dynamics on post-war reconciliation processes. T.R. was also unable to ensure quotations and referenced materials were accurate therefore has chosen to remain anonymous. Personal interview conducted on September 22, 2008 with follow-up telephone interview on September 27, 2008.

M.M.: M.M. originally comes from Gulu and her husband comes from Kitgum. They have been married 26 years, have two kids of their own and adopted four others. She lives in Canada however goes to Uganda every year during July and August to help victims of the war. M.M. hopes that when she retires she will return to Kitgum or Gulu permanently. She would like to either build a school or a home for the elderly as these are both desperately needed. M.M. has been in exile twice, the first time in Nairobi, Kenya during Idi Amin's rule. After this period she returned to Uganda and married but then was forced to leave once again when Museveni came into power as her husband's life was in danger. Personal interview conducted on September 28, 2008.

P.C.: P.C. lives in Toronto and has one wife with four children: three girls and one boy. They came as landed immigrants in 2005. Throughout 1995 he traveled to Kenya, Sudan, Congo, Tanzania and Ethiopia while returning to Uganda between time spent in each country. He then lived in Ethiopia from 1995 to 2005. He is originally from Kitgum district which is in northern Uganda, but is now called Padre. His wife is originally from Gulu district. P.C.'s parents and family were in a displaced camp. In 2004 he lost his mother and in 2008 he lost his father. Some members of his family are in an IDP camp whereas others are scattered within Uganda. Personal interview conducted on October 6, 2008.

In addition to the above interviews conducted by the researcher, Lucy de los Reyes provided thirteen interview transcripts she compiled while undertaking her own Master's thesis on women returning with children from the LRA. Although grateful, it is important to note that I was not present during the process and cannot comment on how the participants were contacted and how the interviews were collected. I do not know if Lucy was able to gain acceptance into the community and cannot guarantee that information provided was honest and truthful. However, Lucy did reveal that she conducted the interviews over multiple visits with the women and noted that with each visit the women appeared to be more trusting and revealed more information. Throughout the findings sections these transcripts will be cited and referenced as (Transcript #).

4.5 Data Analysis

The majority of the semi-structured interviews were audiotaped and transcribed to clearly articulate the information provided by the participants. The hand written notes from non-tape recorded interviews were also typed. All of the data then underwent grounded theory analysis, a technique which highly compliments the naturalist paradigm underlying the research. Westhues et al. (1999) state that:

naturalist research maintains an inductive approach that allows the data to speak. As opposed to beginning the research process with fixed theoretical assumptions, naturalists employ emergent, flexible, and adaptive designs (participant observation, in-depth interviews, unstructured questions) to gather 'thick' and 'rich' data. Theory ideally then emerges from the data" (p. 136).

The interviews were coded as I looked for emerging similarities within each interview and between the interviews. The transcripts were then segmented into broad themes and the data was synthesized. The data was then recoded and placed into sub-categories within in each theme. Subsequently each sub-category was summarized. With regards to Lucy's transcripts, the data was summarized for each of the questions that pertained to my own research interest and then added to the existing themes and sub-categories.

All of the participants were forwarded the sections of findings in which they were quoted or cited to ensure the information they provided during the interview was accurately presented in the thesis. Based on this feedback some revisions and additions were made to the document.

5.0 Findings

The findings focus on validating or disputing the research that was discussed in the literature review as well as presenting what has not been explored in the existing literature. The findings are divided up into seven sections. The first is a discussion of the difficulties associated with the ongoing conflict. The second section discusses the structures of families and community within Acholi culture or society which may have an impact on (re)integration strategies for young women and children. This is followed by a thorough exploration of the experiences of young women in the LRA from the perspective of the participants of this research as well as incorporating the experiences of the women who participated in Lucy's study. Section four discusses the difficulties these individuals experience upon return from the LRA. Section five discusses the most novel findings of this thesis: the skills and strengths young women have

acquired while in captivity. The sixth section focuses on reception centres and NGOs in Uganda. While the seventh and final section explores suggestions on how to improve (re)integration strategies.

5.1 Section 1 – Difficulties Associated with Ongoing Conflict

5.1.1 Where the Situation Stands

This section first highlights opinions about the conflict in an effort to validate the perceptions in the existing literature and to offer an alternative look at the conflict.

Burton (2009) suggests that no one can really articulate the cause of the LRA; they say they are against the government but are more religious and spiritual, like a cult. Kony “does not say he is a prophet [a messenger from God], he says God reigns in him and the spirit controls him” (P.C., 2009). Additionally, with the conflict expanding beyond the national boundaries of Uganda it is difficult to fathom the current aims of the LRA. With the LRA no longer in Uganda fighting the government it raises questions as to why Kony is still fighting; perhaps it is the simple reason that there is nothing for him except the International Criminal Court. Lenz (2009) suggests that “he will never sign the peace accords ever... there is no reason for Kony to stop fighting... and there is no one literally who will welcome him back”. There was hope with the renewed peace talks as the LRA’s second in command, Otti, had wanted to make a deal. Lenz (2009) reveals that this caused two different factions within the LRA: one siding with Kony and the continuation of the struggle, whatever it might be, and the other siding with Otti and perhaps trying to return to Uganda with amnesty. This hope vanished when Otti was executed (Burton, 2009; Lenz, 2009).

The latest peace agreement demonstrated the lack of will on behalf of both of the major actors and raised questions regarding credibility (Burton, 2009). The government always stated that they had a plan B, military intervention, and again reinforced that the government would get the LRA. The 'tough language' used by the government, for example 'they must come out, if they don't we are going to crush them, we are going to kill them all, we shall wipe them out', simply created more fear; "the language of peace cannot be language of threat" (P.C., 2009).

Although Burton (2009) states that there is de facto peace and the agreement has been implemented without Kony's signature, it brings little comfort to the people of northern Uganda who still fear leaving the IDP camps. Burton (2009) revealed that 12 million dollars was donated by six countries, including Canada, for this process. M.M. (2009) suggests that those engaged were just making money without "seriously thinking anything would come out of it" and P.C. (2009) questions the credibility of having the Vice-President of Southern Sudan, Dr. Riek Machar, as the chief mediator when it was Sudan who had supported the LRA in the first place. In any case there remains an emergency situation as people are now being forced, by the government, out of the IDP camps and back to their villages which have been destroyed. Burton (2009) emphasizes that IDP camps still exist; there are land issues (people forget where land is); no services (health, education, water, etc.); no sanitation; land mines; and no jobs.

5.1.2 Implications for Returning Children

Burton (2009) relays that Canada was an integral actor in the peace process and must now step up for the development phase as it is a logical progression to sustain peace and promote regional stability. However, northern Ugandans do not believe peace has been established as Kony has refused to sign the peace agreement, and peace has to come before

reconstruction (M.M., 2009; P.C., 2009). Currently IDP residents are commuting 10-20 kilometers to cultivate the land as they fear returning home and rebuilding; the only way to take this fear away is with peace (P.C., 2009).

In addition to fear and lack of peace, M.M. (2009) describes the new challenges facing northerners as the government forces people out of the IDP camps with no assistance to begin rebuilding their homes. Those who remember where their property is located face challenges such as: vegetation overgrowth, destroyed houses, lack of boundaries between properties and no resources to build a home and cultivate the land (M.M., 2009). M.M. (2009) states that the Acholi only need money to build two grass houses, one to sleep and the other to cook. "The people are very resourceful if you give them that opportunity. All you have to do is give them the seeds, give them the hoes, they'll work it out.... most of our food is actually vegetation, very nice, good food. And some of them within six weeks the food is there" (M.M.). The resources required to relocate northerners and initiate self-sustenance seems a pittance compared to the 12 million donated to the latest unsigned peace agreement.

Additionally, an entire generation has grown up in the camps. Those whose parents died or were killed have no knowledge of where their property is located. Where are they supposed to live? (M.M., 2009).

With specific regard to children returning home from the LRA the implications are greater. Bradbury (2009) reveals that ongoing conflict creates difficulties as communities are not in the mindset to trust going home and initiatives to assist in this process will not be fully resourced until there is peace. Schomerus (2009) states that it is easier to (re)integrate if there is something to (re)integrate into; this process is very difficult without normalcy. Traditional

(re)integration has focused upon the person being (re)integrated however, Schomerus (2009) believes that “it is much more important to focus on the receiving community. If their life has returned to normalcy and they have no fear of further attacks, communities and families can treat returnees very differently... and the returnees feel much more at ease if their families are living in an acceptable situation”. Also, success is intimately tied to family structure in regards to establishing lineage and land, and the returnees need space without taking someone else’s resources (Schomerus, 2009). Peters (2009) states that if the war is over and there is a general atmosphere of reconciliation, and NGOs are counselling the communities for the need of forgiveness and acceptance, the youth “might stand a better chance than if they are able to escape while the conflict is still going on”. Communities are much more hostile during ongoing conflict as “there is a real threat of spies, and [as] they still experience the hardship of the war, they are less likely to start to think about reconciliation” (Peters, 2009).

The above highlights the uniqueness of the civil war in northern Uganda. It is evident that the ongoing conflict creates even greater barriers for the (re)integration of young women and children and hence needs to be an integral consideration in any attempt to plan for this process. Peace must be a primary objective. Also, it underscores the bigger picture of international social work and advocacy. Without pressure on the government of Uganda to seriously end the conflict there will never be peace and there will never be trust. Earlier sections of this thesis have shown that trust has been a major contributing factor in the north-south divide since colonialism. Without commitment on behalf of the government to bring peace and devote attention and resources to the development of the north, the people will continue to have a lack of faith which will further deepen the divide. The initial reasons for

rebellion, marginalization and oppression of the people of the north, will not be remedied but further perpetuate tension and conflict.

5.2 Section 2 - Acholi Culture: Values, Beliefs, Traditions

The importance of understanding culture and tradition is paramount in planning (re)integration programs however, I wonder how often these aspects of society are thoughtfully considered. Twum-Danso (2009) created a monograph which redefines the concept or modifies the image of the child. She states that “the approach to the DDR process would be constructed differently because attitudes or perceptions would be different depending on culture”. Peters (2009) states that “cultural norms and beliefs are an important issue when it comes to the acceptance of people who have been with rebels or the army, but there is indeed a gender difference and very seldom does it work in the advantage of girls”.

What follows is a description of some of the cultural norms and values that Acholi’s hold which may impact upon young women returning with children from the LRA. Responses to this inquiry were varied depending upon the social location of the research participant. While some values appear universal, as multiple participants made similar observations, other observations regarding values and norms appeared conflicting.

5.2.1 The Value of Children

A couple of participants spoke about the importance and value of children with one emphasizing that children are assets in Acholi culture (M.M., 2009). Parents work hard to provide school fees and such hoping that they will be their pension when they are old or

become needy as there is no social assistance or pensions from the government; “God forbid you are incapable of having kids; it is a dark day for you” (M.M., 2009).

Twum-Danso (2009) also reveals that one of the key concepts of children is that they are born to work within the family; “when [children] get to a certain age, in many societies it is age 5 or 6, they are expected to undertake certain responsibilities within the home and also within the wider community”. This valuing of, and reliance upon, children creates a context in which there is no such thing as a bastard child as the extended family will give the child their name (Twum-Danso, 2009). Twum-Danso (2009) suggests that the concept of orphanages does not really work in this context, therefore with so many orphaned children as a consequence of the conflict, “a lot of these children do end up on the streets”.

5.2.2 Role of Girls and Young Women

The literature and media portray girls and women in Africa as submissive, lacking educational and vocational opportunities, the workers in the home and overall lacking voice and agency. My findings suggest that this is the case in Uganda as well. Lenz (2009) states that in traditional Acholi culture women and girls do not stick up for themselves and they were not supposed to have a voice. Although contrary to popular conceptualizations in which girls are viewed as inferior to boys, women and girls are highly valued and play an important role within the home.

Twum-Danso (2009) states:

the labour of girls is needed in order for the family to function. For example, the girl is your washing machine, she is your dishwasher...she is a vacuum cleaner...so when it

comes to education the girls are too valuable within the home to be sent out to go to school. If the girls went to school the household would not run.

This need compounds another cultural norm in northern Uganda in which women become members of, or belong to, their husband's family upon marriage. It was quite interesting to learn about the practice of inheritance marriages, specifically levirate marriage. M.M. (2009) describes how if a man were to die the wife would be incorporated into the marriage and family of a brother or cousin-in-law; "polygamy was an acceptable exercise as long as you are able to look after them". The woman could choose to share a bed with the man or she could choose to be incorporated into the family without sharing a bed, however, she would not be allowed to remarry. "If she chooses to remarry [outside of the husband's family] she loses her kids [as] kids always belong to the man's family, not the woman" (M.M., 2009).

Going back to education and girls attending school, "any education [the girl] is going to gain if you send her to school is not going to benefit you, it is going to benefit her husband's family" (Twum-Danso, 2009); parents will not see a return in their investment so to speak. With limited resources for school fees parents will opt to send their son to school because "your son is always going to be a part of your family [therefore] it is going to be worthwhile" (Twum-Danso, 2009). In regards to some of her interviews in Kampala, Oliver (2009) provided some insight into teacher's attitudes towards girls, which incorporates this patriarchal stance. In an interview with an HIV/AIDS trainer and counselor, she was told about some of the difficulties AIDS trainers experience with teachers, especially concerning gender roles and norms. Some teachers have the attitude that because girls will end up in the kitchen, they are a waste of time and not worth educating (Oliver, 2009).

Lack of resources combined with the girl's own desire to attain an education, force girls to seek out alternative means of securing school fees and other necessities. In a patriarchal society men traditionally provide for women and therefore it is not uncommon for young women to have sex with men in exchange for gifts, transportation, money and sometimes mere survival (Oliver, 2009). Although many behavioural and legal interventions were developed to target the phenomenon of 'Sugar Daddies' (older men having sex with young girls), Oliver's research shows that these interventions are being used to regulate youth, and especially female, sexuality. Because transactional sex has recently been identified as a leading cause of HIV/AIDS in Uganda, there are now billboards promoting changes in attitude and behaviour regarding this phenomenon. Both Oliver (2009) and de los Reyes (2009) described a billboard in Kampala, the capital, which consisted of an old man in a suit and tie with a caption that read "Would you let your teenage daughter sleep with this man? So why are you? Cross-generational sex stops with you". Oliver (2009) was in Uganda studying HIV/AIDS prevention and sexuality programs for youth and was shocked at the difference between boys and girls in an activity where an AIDS trainer asked students to draw 'sex'. Boys drew penises and the act of sex whereas girls drew coffins and big scary men (Oliver, 2009), one would assume as a representation of intergenerational sex and HIV/AIDS.

Three of the participants spoke about men providing for women and women subsequently sleeping with men for this reason: for mere survival or money for school fees. It is surprising that this was not discussed in the reviewed literature. One would think it is an important consideration when so much of the literature describes the girls in the LRA as sex slaves and wives as a result of forced marriage. These studies focus upon the trauma the girls

experienced and the difficulty of (re)integrating when the girls have obviously been raped; a good majority of the research suggests that men will not want to marry them. I question this logic and think it may be a result of our Western ideology. How different is it for girls to engage in intergenerational sex for survival and girls to experience forced marriage? The difference I suppose would be choice; however, if a girl is having sex with an older man for survival is it really choice? Another consideration is that perhaps it is not the act of engaging in sex which is unacceptable but having children out of wedlock which is discussed below. In this case it is not the act that is viewed as sinful but the result of additional mouths to feed which boils down to economics.

Whatever the case, it is an area which requires further exploration as one would think it should be an integral consideration in strategies of (re)integration.

5.2.3 Children with Children

The literature clearly shows that girls who have been raped are outcast and their children are not accepted however, the participants had conflicting opinions. Two respondents provided answers that echoed the research in revealing that there is an aversion and tremendous stigma attached to girls who have been raped and return with children (Bradbury, 2009; Burton, 2009). This is due to the fact that rape is viewed as a sin and the people are highly religious (Burton, 2009). Schomerus (2009) however, reveals that the situation is complicated in Acholi culture because the "society is actually full of children who have children" which is distinct or separate from the LRA. There are no negative cultural attitudes toward promiscuity; there is no stigma and girls or young women are not shunned. While not commenting specifically about attitudes towards rape, Schomerus (2009) also states that there

is a “certain aspect of violence in forced marriages which have also been a part of Acholi culture in general”.

P.C. (2009) reveals that in traditional Acholi culture it is unacceptable for ‘a lady out of wedlock’ to come home with a child. However, due to the war it no longer matters as they have no choice because it is so commonplace. P.C. (2009) divulges the challenges with this situation:

If your daughter was kidnapped, was raped, was impregnated by somebody, produced, came back, you are even grateful that she has come back alive, how many have died there? So what do you do, do you kill the child? No you don’t kill the child, you leave her with the child but it is your responsibility now.... How many people have slept with them forcefully? And how would she know who is the father?... And how sure are you that these young mothers can get married tomorrow to another man? Who will accept marrying a woman with children of that kind?

Therefore there appears to be a change in the attitudes of the Acholi based upon the conflict. However, P.C. (2009) does point out that not all Acholi’s are accepting of this situation; although a minority, some parents “will not see these children with a good heart and take care of them as their own”.

5.2.4 Structural and Attitudinal Changes

As P.C. (2009) alluded to earlier, Acholi structure and attitudes are changing as a result of 23 years of conflict and disintegration of the strong bonds of family and community. Lenz (2009) states that 20 years ago Acholi families had extremely strong structures and belief

systems with different religious aspects to their culture however, much of that has disappeared. This creates a situation where children and youth are not returning to the society in which they left. “Family or community members have been hurt or killed, everyone is displaced, it is very crowded... they come back to a world that is very different from when they left... and the children of today don’t know the traditions all the time” (Lenz, 2009).

M.M. (2009) also verifies that things have changed significantly and attributes it to displacement in IDP camps resulting in the loss of land and crops.

A man who cannot look after his own family... it is like he is not a man anymore... because they have no authority. You can only have authority over a woman or your word can only go so far if you are able to feed the family or keep them together (M.M., 2009).

Additionally, women are now increasingly the heads of households due to the large number of men who have been killed or died due to illness or disease. Traditionally women needed men because men had the opportunity for education and employment and therefore could provide for women. In many African countries a woman without a man is considered untrustworthy and generally “women are not conceptualized without men” (T.R., 2009). However, because of the conflict society has become much more tolerant of women without men (T.R., 2009).

5.2.5 NGOs Orchestrating Change

In addition to the natural change that is occurring in the north, NGOs are attempting to promote change in gender inequality at a national level as this is seen as driving both the AIDS

and poverty epidemics (Oliver, 2009; Schomerus, 2009). A.P. (2009) states that there needs to be a greater cultural shift in the perception of gender inequality however, NGOs lack the organization and communication to orchestrate programs and work together effectively. While not downplaying the need for NGOs to overcome their territoriality and work together, perhaps the greatest criticism of NGOs across time and context, Oliver (2009) described some attempts for changing patriarchal attitudes. These include billboards throughout Kampala promoting female empowerment, radio shows and newspaper columns discussing healthy relationships, as well as an initiative called Young, Empowered and Healthy (Y.E.A.H.) which is targeting the definition of masculinity. This initiative was created due to the recognition that men need to be brought into the discussions of gender inequality and men need to change their behaviours, not just women. They have created t-shirts with the qualities of redefined masculinity including: non-violence, respectful, caring and faithfulness. There has been some resistance to this as men are taping out 'faithfulness' however, one cannot expect change overnight.

This section on Acholi structure was included to give the reader an idea of the complexity of navigating and negotiating one's acceptance back into a family and community. However, the information presented also emphasizes that culture and attitudes are neither universal nor fixed. It is not only the young women and children who have changed based upon their experiences but also families and communities. So how does one plan for and promote acceptance? How do you prepare the individual, family and community? Perhaps the best way forward is to look at the difficulties experienced by girls and children who have already gone through the process of (re)integration. Although backward and unhelpful for those who have

already returned, it may prove the easiest and fastest way to understanding the unique challenges in preparation for the next wave of 'returnees'.

5.3 Section 3 – Experiences of Girls and Young Women in the LRA

5.3.1 Initiation

Because of the reports in the literature about children being forced to kill their parents upon abduction and commit other atrocities, I wanted to verify the extent to which this occurs, as I am cautious about sensationalism in the media and literature. Lenz (2009) states that not all children are forced to kill their parents or another person upon abduction; however, they will all go through an orientation process on the night they were abducted, where they will at least witness someone dying. Lenz (2009) further elaborated that the LRA do not use their guns for this as they save their ammunition for fighting, so they find other ways of killing; some of the worst types of torture you could imagine.

It tends to be maybe taking a bat and having another child beat the person until, you know, beat their head until their brain comes out. Or I have heard a couple times where they were made to bite the child until they died.... A lot of it is with axes or stabbing the person over and over and over again. They used to cut off their lips and their noses (Lenz, 2009).

Tragically, some are forced to kill or rape members of their family which makes them feel like they have no choice but to stay (Lenz, 2009). The commanders "put so much fear in these kids that they don't even know there is a way out.... So they just do what they are told; it is really scary" (Lenz, 2009).

5.3.2 Experience of Girls

The Transcripts revealed that the ages at abduction range from 11 years old at the youngest to 27 years of age at the oldest. The most common age at abduction was 12 (4 girls); two girls each for ages 16 and 18; and one girl each for ages 13, 14 and 17.

Upon abduction, Lenz (2009) explained that there is a ritual in which the fate of each child is determined. The young girls who are kidnapped are usually not given to a man right away; if they are under ten years old, girls will be given as a babysitter to one of the older girls. If the girl is older than ten she “will be given to a man as his wife, but even if they are given to a man they will still use her as a babysitter sometimes too because he may not think she is mature enough. So it also depends on the man who receives her” (Lenz, 2009).

All of the women in the transcripts reported fighting as a primary role while with the LRA. There was one exception to this; a girl who spent only three and a half months with the LRA redistributed looted money and goods that the rebels brought back from raids. Other roles that these girls performed, in addition to fighting, were cooking and agriculture.

Three of the women explained that once they had given birth they were no longer allowed to fight and their gun was taken away. Lenz (2009) confirmed that once the girls were pregnant or gave birth they were sent to Sudan where it was safer to raise their children. Two women spoke about being on an emergency standby team in case fighting intensified. One of the women stated that she had fought with her baby on her back. One woman revealed that she had three 12 year old babysitters for her three children (Transcript #8). Lenz (2009) explained that girls who were good fighters often had babysitters, although other girls would literally have their babies on their back fighting. However, “when you hear on-the-back

fighting, it is usually because they were in a cross-fire; they were walking someplace and suddenly they got hit" (Lenz, 2009).

5.3.3 Forced Marriage

In regards to girls being given to men as wives the transcripts revealed the following about ages: ranged from 11 years of age to 28; 2 girls were given at age 13; 2 girls at 14; and one girl each from ages 15-18. This shows that girls were in fact not necessarily given to men right after abduction. And while it seems shocking that girls as young as 11-14 were given as wives, as Lenz (2009) mentioned above, these girls may have acted as babysitters or perhaps labourers within the home, as many mentioned they were the third, fourth, or even seventh wife of their 'husband'.

A.P. (2009) stated that in Sierra Leone many girls preferred forced marriage because they would then be attached to one person. Although the 'marriage' was violent and coercive it meant that they were able to secure more resources and were offered more protection i.e. instead of many boys and men raping them, only one man raped them. Peters (2009) also states that:

if [the girls] are kept as sex slaves it's a really bad situation for them... I think they still have some kind of agency to play. The few girls that I have spoken to have really tried to link up with one commander who was able then to protect them and at least in that case they were not exposed to multiple rape. So they still have some opportunity to make the best out of a really bad situation.

de los Reyes (2009) made the following statement based upon her interviews: "no one became pregnant from rape so to say, all were with husbands however it is clear this was rape

as refusal would mean death". Only three out of the thirteen women had responded that rape occurred, one elaborated by explaining "if a person refused they said it meant they wanted to escape" and de los Reyes (2009) further revealed that "she was eventually given to this same man as his wife" (Transcript #4). One other woman commented that rape did not occur in Kony's compound but she describes the fate of one girl: "there was another girl who was given to a commander she didn't like and then she fell in love with another commander and they killed her in front of everyone" (Transcript #8). The remainder of de los Reyes' participants did not comment on whether or not rape occurred. I think it is a safe assumption that most girls were raped by the men they were given to, however as discussed in the literature review, these girls do not view it as rape as the perpetrator became their husband. It appears as though these girls were only forced to have sex with one man, there is no indication that they were raped by multiple men. As well, it appears that girls were not solely given to commanders as rewards but that the aim was procreation and the creation of a new Acholi race.

Lenz (2009) revealed that many girls eventually developed a relationship with their 'husbands' and "became very jealous of the other women coming in to this man"; some girls remained with these men once out of the LRA. This raises questions around the possibility of these girls and young women experiencing Stockholm Syndrome: "a psychological response sometimes seen in abducted hostages, in which the hostage shows signs of loyalty to the hostage-taker, regardless of the dangers or risk in which they have been placed" (Wikipedia, 2009c). Psychoanalytically, it has been described as a similar strategy evolved by new born babies in which the individual forms an emotional attachment to the nearest powerful adult in order to maximize the probability of survival (Wikipedia, 2009c).

Lenz (2009) postulates that these women may remain with their 'husbands' as they feel they have no other choice as their families or communities have rejected them. In some cases this arrangement would be beneficial "in the sense that they still have a support system, somebody that understands them, knows what they went through and they kind of deal with society together" (Lenz, 2009). On the other hand, it could be detrimental if the man is dominating and the woman is not empowered to make choices or have control of her life (Lenz, 2009). Lenz (2009) reveals that she knows maybe five girls who have stayed with their 'husbands' and seem pretty happy:

they may not be but on the surface at least this is what they show me. And they are pretty accepted in the community and the way they describe their relationships was that the person was very caring towards them, he gave them choices while in captivity, he helped them try to escape at a certain time perhaps. Or if he had three or four different wives, when he came back he would always give her more food or clothing or you know he treated her better than the other women that he had. So oftentimes it was because there was maybe a greater bond or there was more caring or love in that relationship than we would want to think right off the bat.

Again, this is perhaps something that should be researched in more detail.

5.3.4 Children Born in the Bush

The children born in the LRA are "highly valued and treated very differently than the child soldiers. They are the ones given the privilege to go to school or given extra

responsibility” (Lenz, 2009). All of the women in the transcripts stated that many girls gave birth in the bush.

The age range for childbirth in the bush based on the transcripts was fourteen to twenty-nine. The most common ages were 15 and 18, with three girls of each age. The other ages at first childbirth were 16, 17, 21 and 22 with one girl falling into each.

In total these 13 women delivered 16 children while in the bush and 2 additional children were conceived in the bush but delivered in the community after the mother was able to escape. Of these 16 children, 4 died. One woman attributed the death of her child to a co-wife who was mistreating her; one died of malaria; and the other two are unknown.

It does not appear uncommon for babies and small children to die while in the LRA; one woman estimated that one child died every week in her camp in Sudan (Transcript #7). The most common causes of death were sickness (i.e. malaria or cholera), reported by seven women, and gunshots during battle, reported by six women. Five women reported that during intense battle girls would sometimes throw their babies away because it was impossible to run and fight with them. However, most of the women reported no knowledge of girls or women abandoning or killing their children on purpose. Lenz (2009) also states that she does not know any women who killed or abandoned their child(ren). There was an orphanage where young women could leave their baby and then get them back once they were able to escape, therefore she knows many girls who did this with the hopes of getting them back (Lenz, 2009).

That is very fascinating; they have been raped... and they really love their children. For the most part I would say that they love the children no matter where they are

conceived and they treat them like they are a normal child and they don't give any of their other children special privileges or anything (Lenz, 2009).

The women from the transcripts stated that children were only abandoned on purpose if the mother was escaping and the child was too big to carry with her. One woman described how she witnessed a woman drop her baby on purpose because it was too difficult to carry but the father found the child and it did not die (Transcript #7). Another woman described how commanders "would beat the mothers up sometimes for leaving the children behind because many were doing it on purpose or others were being pig-headed... the commanders said the kids were going to be their successors" (Transcript #6). More seriously, one woman described how a mother strangled her own son and threw his body in the bush because he was not walking fast enough. The commanders then killed the mother (Transcript #13).

This demonstrates the degree to which these children and youth are brainwashed as well as the difficulty in interpreting the sometimes conflicting demands placed upon them. It is ingrained in them that those who fall behind the rest of the unit are killed, they are forcefully impregnated, some are still required to fight even with the babies on their backs which puts the child in danger and results in many deaths, yet they are punished if they try to get rid of their babies. Not only that, one woman described how if a woman died, the commanders would kill the babies that are too young to walk or be of any use. I imagine this would only be on the battlefield, as most of the respondents described how other wives or friends would look after other mother's babies and children if they were to die or abandon them. In any case, these girls who are fighting are doing what they are trained to do; to fight effectively and efficiently and to reinforce what happens to children who do not keep up with the group. This is perhaps

an area that should be taken under consideration when one is planning for the return of these mothers. There is debate about the effectiveness and applicability of doing psychosocial counselling however this is an area where I could potentially see many young women struggling.

5.3.5 Experiences Based Upon Location

One of the most notable and important pieces of this thesis was the discovery of very different experiences based upon where the girls were located, as well as the skills and strengths they acquired while in LRA captivity. Lenz (2009) contends that these experiences and skills have not been reported in the literature as many researchers simply do not ask the girls. People assume that they were forced to fight, that they were raped and had children, and they experienced great hardship with the rebels without learning a single thing that could benefit them in society. Lenz (2009) has discovered quite the opposite during her extensive work with these young women.

There are really two different types of experiences for girls in the LRA depending on where they were located. If the girls were in Uganda they were constantly walking with heavy loads and fighting the Ugandan military. Whereas if the girls were in Sudan, where girls were typically sent once they became pregnant, they almost had normal lives (Lenz, 2009).

They had a house that they would have built, they would have farmed in the afternoons, they would have made charcoal and they would have sold it in the markets, in the Sudanese community. They did bartering [and] they learned different types of cattle stuff or whatever.... There were schools and hospitals built by the rebels themselves which were hidden. The children of the girls would go to school and learn math and

English or whatever.... They still had their drills in the morning that they had to go through, they all had to learn how to fight, they all learned how to use a gun, and eventually some were given more responsibility than others. But they also had parties and entertainment and movies and dances (Lenz, 2009).

The girls described a big celebration of Kony every April where there were huge parties and dancing, food was prepared and they got to watch a movie (Lenz, 2009). This is verified by a woman in Transcript #1 who explains that an LRA camp in Sudan was 'set-up was similar to home' and even contained a small health unit where they gave her anti-malarial medicine.

5.3.6 Skills and Strengths

There is virtually nothing in the literature on the skills or strengths of children returning from rebel forces. For the majority of those who were interviewed in this thesis the most common responses, and many of them were hypothesized, include: responsibility and leadership (3); independence and self-sufficiency (3); friendship or solidarity (3); empowerment, assertiveness, self-confidence (5); and being outspoken.

A.P. (2009) suggests that some girls were empowered by developing friendships and solidarity which was forbidden. Peters (2009) also comments on the social capital and strong bonds of friendship which is created during war. Although people are now beginning to examine this social capital and how to use it constructively in society, Peters (2009) is only aware of this occurring for male returnees.

Schomerus' (2009) research revealed that boys were more assertive and showed more capacity to stick with programs and tasks as they were more disciplined. Women were extremely self-sufficient and the children in general were much more alert and had a stronger

character. It is surprising that “given the huge numbers of people who have been with the LRA, the number of those who show disturbed behaviour that is dangerous to others is quite low” (Schomerus, 2009).

In regards to the identified strength of being outspoken, Peters (2009) discussed how this is actually detrimental in many cases as these women find it very difficult to (re)integrate and are “very unlikely to go back to a role where they are quiet and listen to their husbands”. That being said, Peters (2009) also comments that being outspoken has the potential to be positive given the proper context:

if the whole post war reconstruction phase is mainly about trying to turn back the clock as nothing has happened, it might be that these women find it particularly difficult. But in the case where the wider community and even on a national scale there is some preparedness to grant more opportunities to young people, to let them say what they have to say and to take their agency serious, then [for] these young women who might be very outspoken you can imagine a much more active role.

A.P. (2009) suggests that the real strengths come from participating in (re)integration programs where they learn new skills such as seamstress, hairdresser, tie-dying, numeracy and literacy as the children and youth would not have had the opportunity to learn them had they not become child soldiers. There are some however, who would refute the usefulness of these (re)integration programs, which will be discussed later in the thesis.

The most novel findings were reported by Lenz (2009). While most literature reveals maybe 10 or 15 types of skills, again all related to fighting, Lenz’s research revealed over 70

different types including: being trained as nurses by actual doctors while in captivity, keeping track of finances, and the distribution of looted money and valuables.

You could start to see that they had various management skills or they had various types of public speaking skills, or administration types of skills. It was just fascinating to look at it deeper than just the surface (Lenz, 2009).

Lenz is currently writing a book and attempting to disseminate her findings. This will hopefully spark interest in the international community for more empowerment types of programming. Closer examination of the girls' experiences while in LRA captivity revealed that not all girls suffered the same fate. Although it can be assumed that all children experienced traumatic events as a result of violent abduction, and at least the witnessing of death during initiation, not all children suffered the extreme brutality which is presented as universal in the literature. I believe that writers oftentimes sensationalize these experiences for a greater reaction; in the case of NGOs, perhaps for a greater shock value when approaching international funders. Alternatively this may be an innocent product of extreme circumstances becoming 'normalized'.

Overall this section has described young women's experience while in the LRA. Although one would not hope that this is representative of all of the women in the LRA, the transcripts and Lenz's knowledge and experience validate one another. Not only does this section capture their lived experience in an attempt to demonstrate the horrendous years they may have lived while in captivity, it also serves to highlight the fact that not all women went through the exact same thing.

Not all girls and young women fought, nor did they all perceive that they were raped. These are both really important considerations when planning for the return of young women. There is so much focus on trauma, and labeling individuals as ‘traumatized’, that I feel it could be detrimental in some circumstances. It is clear that all of these children and youth experienced traumatic events; however the extent to which these events affect them will vary greatly depending upon the individual’s capacity to cope and those supports which exist around the individual. I think it is a fallacy to lump everyone together in a common discourse of hopelessness and trauma and assume they are all in need of intense psychosocial counselling. Many girls would not see themselves in this light and those working with families and communities may be misrepresenting the returnee’s experiences and needs in a way that creates a more undesirable situation in the community. This will be further discussed in Section 5: Reception Centres and the International Community.

5.4 Section 4 – Difficulties Experienced Upon Return

Now that we have an understanding of some of the experiences young women and children went through while living in captivity, we will now turn our attention to how these young women returned and their experiences upon return to the community. This section begins with a short discussion on the length of time in captivity and how the young women were able to return to their communities. It then describes some of the challenges they bring with them as well as the general difficulties of returning to an IDP camp. It then moves into a brief discussion of the process of reception centres, followed by an exploration of the extent to which these young women and children are accepted by their families and communities, and

leads into a discussion on possible factors affecting (re)integration success. The section then discusses additional barriers the women may experience in regards to traditional ceremonies and finding a husband, and ends by revealing the outcomes for these women if they are rejected.

5.4.1 Length of Captivity and Return

As discussed in the previous section, girls in Sudan would typically have easier lives as they were not constantly fighting, walking and starving. The downside however is that they remained with the LRA for much longer periods of time as it was very difficult to escape. The bases were in mountainous areas of Sudan and the girls did not know their way out or they didn't know the language. Lenz (2009) explains that this is why girls "are typically in captivity longer than boys [which can be] anywhere from 7 to 15 years. Whereas if they were in Uganda and they managed to escape, usually the time in captivity was less than 3 years". Lenz (2009) described how girls would pray to be picked to go into Uganda with a group of soldiers so they could try to escape.

As they are travelling and fighting and attacking different villages they may actually know that village so they may know someone who knows them or [can find] a way for them to connect. Whereas if you are in Sudan, it's not their culture, it is not their people, they don't know anybody there and so they are looking for support as well not just a pathway but who is going to be there to actually help them get out (Lenz, 2009).

I found the length of abduction revealed in the transcripts quite staggering: only two girls were with the LRA for less than 2 years (3.5 months and 15 months); the remainder were

there anywhere from 3 years to 9 years (three years (2); four years (1); five years (2); six years (2); seven years (1); eight years (2); nine years (1)).

Eight of the thirteen women stated that they escaped during a battle with the Ugandan army; two of them stated that during the battle many of the rebels were killed and they pretended that they were dead. Two other women ran away and two others were actually allowed to leave; one stated that her husband had died and she and her children were allowed to come home with 17 other widows (Transcript #17), while another explained that she was sent away by her husband because of serious unrest in the bush (Transcript #11). Again this is an anomaly within the literature. I have not come across literature that detailed girls who were simply allowed to leave. The fact that girls were allowed to send children home to their families while they remained in the bush was another interesting discovery (Transcripts).

Young women and children returning to their families and communities either pass through a reception centre or they return on their own without assistance. Lenz (2009) estimates that 60% of girls go through a center where they would receive rehabilitation in the form of counselling and other material or medical things. Typically, they would live in the centre for about three weeks and then be given the opportunity to learn a skill or attend school. However, in most cases young mothers do not have the option of attending school as NGOs are only able to offer schooling for one person, the young child, because of the lack of resources. During their stay at the centre, tracing teams will find their families and begin preparing them to receive their daughter and grandchild(ren).

The transcripts revealed that eight women went through a centre with their length of stays varying from 3 days to 9 months. The discrepancy in the length of time spent at the

centre may be a result of how much assistance they required, for example the young woman who only stayed for three days was only with the LRA for three and a half months, or it could be a result of how busy the NGO was at the time: how many beds were available and how much assistance they could offer. More will be discussed regarding the length of stay in the next section. Three women stated that they did not go through a centre and the information was unknown for the remaining two individuals. All of the individuals who went through the centres stated that they were given psychosocial support but not all were offered or given skills training. Five of the women thought the centre was helpful while one explicitly stated that it was not helpful because it was too crowded.

5.4.2 Difficulties

While these young women have experienced traumatic events much of what has happened to them cannot be talked about because it is so shameful; they try to hide it and therefore do not deal with the psychological issues they are experiencing (T.R., 2009). “How many died, and what they went through in the bush... when somebody escapes... and are brought back they are forced to beat that person [to death].... How will it get off your mind? You are living but you are dead you see” (P.C., 2009). Many of the respondents suggest that it takes “many years to come back to normality, to come back as before” (P.C., 2009). M.M. (2009) states:

you don't know whether to pray that they had died in the bush because some of these kids have come back so damaged and it takes a lot of patience for them to get back to normal, whatever normal is, because their lives as children was robbed of them.

Additionally, M.M. (2009) describes the experience of one mother in an IDP camp:

‘the night is terrible because my child gets nightmares, the screaming in the night is unbearable’. And in the night the lady herself is scared that this girl, this daughter of hers, could easily stab her to death in her sleep... she says she has to sleep with one eye open. You have just that one little hut in the camp... she starts screaming... everybody is awake... everybody’s disturbed.

M.M. (2009) discovered that parents were not being counseled or prepared for “the nature of the kids they were going to get back” which creates a clash.

Their children left as kids, very innocent, very young, and after maybe 8 or 5 years in the bush they are coming back now as men and women, and very bitter because they feel their parents did not protect them, their parents were enjoying themselves while they were being tortured. So when they come back, they are not relatives they are enemies.

(M.M., 2009)

Education and counselling for families and communities is one of the primary roles of reception centres and NGOs in northern Uganda. However, one could imagine that it is difficult for NGOs to speak to every single person before the families are united; the resources do not exist. Additionally, many girls and young women do not even pass through reception centres instead finding and returning to their families directly upon escape or release as was mentioned previously in the literature review.

Returning to an IDP camp proves particularly challenging for a couple of different reasons. First of all, in an IDP camp there is nowhere to hide. You live with your family in a one room hut, huts are packed together without any privacy and people know that you have

returned from the rebels (Schomerus, 2009). Additionally, some have the burden of returning to the same place in which they were abducted by the LRA; where their families and soldiers failed to protect them and they most likely witnessed horrible violence. P.C. (2009) states that they are “coming back to the camp and living in fear, some of them were abducted [and tortured] in the same camp they have come back to. So now they are sitting there in the camp, how sure are they even that they will last the next morning?”

In addition to the crowded nature of IDP camps and the memories of horrific experiences, there is no way to earn a living or support yourself with crops or gardens. With the government now forcing people to leave the IDP camps and return to villages, which are also lacking in development and resources, M.M. (2009) speaks of the potential to create more conflict and violence.

What is really going to become of their lives? First they have been robbed of their childhood, so they are no longer kids. Everybody treats them like an adult with completely no means; they cannot even afford to feed themselves proper diets.... [Some of the boys] were forced to murder their own parents. For somebody who has murdered his own father what has he got to lose? All he will need is a gun and he will terrorize the village.... That always follows after the war because there are so many guns in the villages (M.M., 2009).

Compounded by all of this is the fact that many young women return to discover their parents have died from AIDS, other diseases or LRA attacks. So now they become the caretaker for the rest of their siblings (M.M., 2009; P.C., 2009). Unfortunately, these young women who are struggling with their own trauma, who may also be sick or wounded, and are raising their

younger siblings, are now being forced out of the IDP camp with the expectation of rebuilding their home and land without any government assistance (M.M., 2009; P.C., 2009).

5.4.3 Acceptance

The literature presents girls and young women with children as the most difficult group to (re)integrate and as a result there is very limited success. This opinion was shared by many of the participants in this research. Peters (2009) states that “if they have a child they are also very exposed to community attacks; verbal attacks and labelling as a rebel wife”. Also, in many societies girls are typically not allowed to have fighting roles therefore, the role reversal they undergo while with rebel forces creates an additional barrier for (re)integration as compared to boys (Peters, 2009). Burton (2009) briefly described how elders and leaders would ask the girls questions about what happened to them and if they ‘pass the test’ they are fine. Although he did not reveal what these questions are, he concluded that there is more aversion to girls who have been raped because it is viewed as a sin. Extrapolating from this comment one would assume that girls returning with children would be perceived as rape victims and hence would experience difficulty with elders and leaders. Bradbury (2009) also is of the opinion that girls are greatly stigmatized for being raped and therefore experience greater hardship.

But does additional barriers or stigma translate into families and communities not accepting their daughters and grandchild(ren)? M.M. (2009) suggests that children and youth in general are not well received; they are labeled as abductees or killers and are ostracized and feared by their own families and community. As a result, they do not know where to turn and they become suicidal as they see themselves as rejects; their confidence is at zero and they have no role models (M.M., 2009).

Other participants, however, believe that children and youth are generally accepted.

T.R. (2009) is of the opinion that generally children and youth will be accepted; “there has to be negotiations for acceptance and it may be a troubled re-entry however they will be accepted”.

P.C. (2009) states “of course they are accepted... there are some few examples... of mistreatment here and there... you can expect those types of things. But they are acceptable now within the community, there is nothing people can do”. P.C. (2009) further describes the situation facing families:

most say to themselves, we are Acholi, we forgive easily, we love and value people, we have respect for one another... it is a relief that your daughter is back with you now and you then think that these children are just innocent and you never know what these children will be in the future. So I believe there are many people who are taking care of these children and it is only that we lack resources now; that is the only problem. We lack resources and of course we need a lot of resources to make sure that these people come to a productive sort of life again... the person who is in the camp cannot even take care of himself [with his daughter and her children] it adds more problems onto a problem.

Ten of the women in the transcripts stated that their families were accepting of both themselves and their children. One woman stated that her husband accepted her back but not her child, and one woman revealed that her parents had died and her brother was abducted and killed while she was in captivity. Therefore, only one woman did not comment on whether or not her family was accepting. From these accounts it appears that families are generally accepting.

The exact opposite can be said about how accepting the community is based on the transcripts. All thirteen women commented that the community was not accepting or there was stigma, with the examples of maltreatment varying from very minor comments (i.e. calling them rebels) or the perception that people were talking behind their back, to being chased from a village (Transcript #13). One woman commented that some people in the community treat her fine but others say that because she stayed in the bush for so long “her head doesn’t work right”; they also tell her new partner that he should not marry her because she cannot make a good woman (Transcript #6). From the transcripts it appears as though the families are more accepting of the young women and children than the community.

Lenz (2009) however states the opposite: that on the whole communities are more welcoming than the families. She attributes this to the fact that community leaders are sensitized and educated to a greater extent and when a family is not accepting it is the leader’s job to speak to the family members to facilitate the transition.

They’ve done a lot with community meetings or having dances and dramas and festivals that have been really helpful. I’m trying to think of a community that would not accept a child, I don’t know of any. It is normally on an individual family level that I would see rejection, not from a whole community (Lenz, 2009).

The discrepancy between Lenz’s account of acceptance and the young women’s account of stigma may be related to the timing in which they returned. Many of the women from the transcripts returned five to eight years ago when perhaps the community leaders were not fully educated and sensitized about the experiences and needs of these children and youth.

There is very little in the literature documenting the experiences of the children born in the bush which is why it was included in this thesis. However, not many people could actually comment on this area because of this gap in the literature. Peters (2009) replied that “there is very little known about what children of young women actually experience... so it is an interesting question”. Those who did have a response again were divided. T.R. (2009) revealed that if a child is abandoned by their mother than the maternal grandparents would take care of that child. However, this is not necessarily an ideal situation as there is a significant possibility that the child will be treated as a second class citizen; the child is viewed as a worker and will not be provided with the opportunity to go to school or study (T.R., 2009). Bradbury (2009) states that there is not a blanket of acceptance for these children, especially once they are over five years old. Burton (2009) says that the children are almost like a proof of guilt which makes it more difficult for families to accept them however they are still cared for and looked after.

A.P. (2009), speaking from the Sierra Leone context, described how girls who gave birth to children would either dispose of them prior to returning to their community or many would simply not return to their community due to the shame of having a rebel baby. This view is shared in the literature however, as was described in the last section, this did not seem to occur as girls typically love their children very much and want to keep them despite the circumstances surrounding their conception and birth (Lenz, 2009; Transcripts). That being said, Lenz (2009) admits that she is aware of cases in which the families of the young woman would pressure her to get rid of the child.

I have heard about the mother being so stressed over the fact that her family is angry that she has a baby that sometimes she could abandon her baby or the family would try

to kill the baby that she brought back.... There are cases like that definitely there, where the child was left or drowned or put in the river or something, but it often times happens with twins as well, that is an Acholi cultural thing that goes beyond the LRA. But I would say for the most part they do love their kids and would try not to abandon them (Lenz, 2009).

Schomerus (2009) states that children born in the bush are not stigmatized at all if they are young; if they are younger than eight they are considered just a child. Additionally, it is Schomerus' (2009) opinion that the community is much more cautious with teenage boys and young men than young children and women. However, the women in de los Reyes' study felt that the community was not accepting of their children. One woman described how the community says bad things about her son who was conceived in the bush because she was unmarried at the time (Transcript #11). Whereas another woman in a similar situation disclosed that "the child is fine because she was only conceived in the bush, if a child is born in the bush they have the mentality [of the rebels] but since her child was born in the village it takes the mentality of the villagers" (Transcript #4). Some community members think that the children born in the bush should stay at home (Transcript #9), another woman recalls the community calling her a rebel and telling her she should have had an abortion (Transcript #8), and another woman commented that people treat her child badly and say, "that is just a rebel, a new generation of rebels" (Transcript #3).

Lenz (2009) says there is a mixture of outcomes for these young women and children which explains the contradictions in the literature and this research.

Of the girls I know, some have been able to (re)integrate with their children perfectly fine with their families ... and others have been completely out-casted and they are not allowed to come into the family when their child is there. There are also times when I've seen a girl who has come back and she decides to marry somebody and then her baby, that she had in captivity, is not welcome into the family. So oftentimes the grandmother will take the child; in a sense she gives up her baby so she can be married to this man who will take care of her. So I have seen it in a lot of ways, I wouldn't say it's one way or the other.

Lenz (2009) also describes how families may accept the child on the surface but not completely because it is very deeply ingrained in their culture not to.

I did see one family that the mother brought the child back and she was accepted into the family and the baby was accepted but her baby ended up dying, it had a heart disease, and when they went to bury it the baby was not allowed to be buried in the family plot. So although on the surface they were very welcoming to her and her family, at the end of the day they were not welcoming to her baby when it died (Lenz, 2009).

When you look at children who are now in middle school, for the most part they are fine, they may occasionally get teased from other students but Lenz (2009) states that there are so many child soldiers and children who have been affected by the war in general that everybody has issues. Lenz (2009) concludes that "on the whole children are not out-casted"; they may still experience some negative things but they will not be left out of everything in society.

It is difficult to understand why so much of the literature states that these individuals are generally unaccepted. I am not suggesting that researchers are misrepresenting their data; perhaps those they are seeking for their interviews or those who were provided as participants were not very representative of this group in general. Another possibility is that a couple of years ago perhaps they were not as easily accepted and with the international community enlisting the help of local leaders and organizations they have been able to educate and sensitize families and the rest of society. In any case it must be stated that for the most part these young women and children are accepted. There may be the exception but it is just that, an exception. With that being said there are additional barriers and challenges the young women and children face upon return. We now move on to a brief discussion about possible factors that could affect the (re)integration of young women and their children.

5.4.4 Factors Affecting Acceptance

There are many factors which have the potential to impact young women and children's acceptance although it is another area that has not been explored in the existing literature. T.R. (2009) stated that this is a worthwhile topic to explore as she could only respond by conjecture. She believes that most people want children back however possible factors for successful (re)integration could include: the relationship between the individual and family member receiving her (i.e. daughter versus niece); perhaps their class or financial situation (whether or not they would have the resources to support her and her child); if she committed a crime against the community during abduction and needs to pay restitution (i.e. a goat for mato oput is costly); the degree of sensitization the family and community receives; or if the young woman

was experiencing 'cen' and needed to go to a traditional healer whom they would have to pay (T.R., 2009).

Twum-Danso (2009) states that if the child is able to contribute to the family then perhaps the family would be more willing to have them back.

However, if the child is disabled and they are not able to [contribute] then they are not going to be willing. If the daughter has been raped and she also has a child, she is going to be an added burden, another mouth to feed. If they cannot afford it then they might not be willing either (Twum-Danso, 2009).

Lenz (2009) views education, sensitization and support systems for both the individual and family as key factors for successful (re)integration. She points out that although resources are important, religion and tradition are also key factors: the amount of money or resources a family has will not matter if they are highly religious or have a very strong traditional mindset (Lenz, 2009).

Something that was completely unexpected, and again not found in the literature, is that some women have power due to their status of being wives to Kony or other high commanders (Bradbury, 2009). People in the community want to befriend these women as they believe they won't be targeted, hurt or abducted if they are friends. Therefore, these women may have an easier time (re)integrating as there appears to be a higher level of support. Additionally, the children of high profile rebels are sometimes privileged as other children "know not to mess with them" and adults often let them get away with things other children would not be able to get away with (Bradbury, 2009). As well, power and friends come

with money; the Ugandan government provides high profile people resources to become spokespeople for the government (Bradbury, 2009).

Many respondents view traditional cleansing ceremonies as beneficial for both the individual in need of (re)integration as well as the community during the process of acceptance. A.P. (2009) views cultural and social acceptance via traditional ceremonies as more beneficial than resources due to the fact that society is based on sustenance rather than a money economy. A.P. (2009) states “cultural (re)integration goes a long way because these girls are seen as dirty, crazy and a range of other things that are assumed to be wrong with her.... Traditional (re)integration is like a re-birthing to erase the past”. Peters (2009) agrees that the cleansing ritual is important for community acceptance.

It is something that is sometimes overlooked by reception centres that do a lot of counselling which may be helpful or not helpful for the girl. The advantage of cleansing rituals is not only that the girl may be helped if she strongly believes in the power of these cleansing rituals, but also the community accepts the girl. With counselling and reception centres the attitude of the community is not changed (Peters, 2009).

Lenz (2009) agrees that many centres and people involved in (re)integration and rehabilitation would take this perspective. However, because of the changes to family and community structure that were presented in Section Two, it may not be beneficial to the individual undergoing (re)integration and perhaps even harmful. Lenz (2009) states that for the majority of children it is most likely beneficial as they still value the Acholi traditions and customs. However, there are many children who do not know the traditions and customs because they have been with the LRA since they were very young, or they no longer believe in

the customs or practices, or they are born-again Christian or Muslim. The young women who do not want to go through the traditional cleansing ceremonies but are forced, “feel targeted because they are put out in front of a crowd, everyone knows they are a child soldier, and they are constantly told that they are possessed if they don’t go through the ceremony” (Lenz, 2009). If they do not go through the religious ceremony they are “kind of outcast again by their society” (Lenz, 2009). Even counsellors and social workers in reception centres try to convince returnees to go through the traditional ceremonies to remedy their ‘possession’ (Lenz, 2009). Therefore, there needs to be caution surrounding the use of traditions and consideration of how the children themselves have changed based upon their experiences while in captivity (Lenz, 2009).

Of the thirteen women from the transcripts, only three participated in the stepping on the egg ritual. One woman explicitly stated that she did not want to step on the egg and the elders told her it was ok, however it must be noted that this woman also reported the most challenges with her community, revealing “she was treated very badly by her community, they chased her away from the village and she fears for her life were she to go back” (Transcript #2). This begs the question of whether that ritual really had an impact on how the community treated her.

Traditions therefore appear to be a current source of conflict between girls returning and the community. Lenz (2009) reveals that the community:

still believes in the traditions and they are looking at her as possessed and evil and how can we let this person back into our community if she isn’t going to go through this ritual?... So her refusal to participate is a sign of possession... they are labelling her even

though she doesn't feel that way... and she has actually found a voice and cannot understand why people won't listen to her.

This is a very important consideration when working with families and communities in education and awareness-raising initiatives as well as general training of staff working with these individuals.

5.4.5 Post - (Re)Integration

A.P. (2009) states that the stigma these young women experience makes it very difficult to find a husband which is a very serious problem in these cultures as marriage is tied to resources. Similarly, Schomerus (2009) states that it is difficult to be without a husband in northern Uganda; it is worse to be without a husband than having an LRA husband. Therefore, it is not necessarily a bad thing to marry their LRA husbands or remain with them once they have left the LRA. In fact, some of the LRA wives live with their husband's family even if the husband is still in the bush (Schomerus, 2009). Schomerus (2009) feels that this demonstrates how interconnected the various aspects of the conflict are and how deeply the rules of the war are entrenched in society. Twum-Danso (2009) states that men in the community would be wary of young women who have returned because they may have been raped or used as sex slaves, alternatively these young women may have been empowered which is not expected nor perhaps desirable in their society.

Lenz (2009) postulates that in cases where women do not have a tangible skill they would probably feel they need a man in their lives to support them and their child, as men have more opportunities and choices for employment, and he can go places and get things more easily than a woman usually can. Therefore, marriage would be a big draw because she would

feel she can be supported. But not being married does not inhibit them like it would in say Asia; “they could survive on their own if they were given more opportunities and if they felt empowered to take up those opportunities” (Lenz, 2009). Lenz (2009) personally knows three former child soldiers with children who currently live by themselves and are able to support themselves and their children. As there are now a number of single women in the camps and villages because they are widowed or now the head of the household, being single is more normal than it used to be in the traditional culture (Lenz, 2009).

Of the thirteen women in the transcripts ten had more children upon returning from the LRA. In total 19 additional children were born. Of these women only one remains married, she was married with two children before her abduction, and one woman revealed that her husband just recently passed away. Five young women revealed that they were single, three said they were co-habiting with the fathers of their youngest child(ren) and three women did not comment on their relationship status. For individuals with few opportunities for success in life it is disheartening to discover that these women continue to have kids and lack the support necessary in some cases to raise them properly and send them to school.

Many of the women stated that their partner did not treat the child from the bush very well (Transcripts). For example one woman commented that her partner said, “even if he took care of her she would still grow into a rebel” (Transcript #11) and another said that the man she was with “hated the kids” and abused them (Transcript #13). The woman who remains married states that her husband “does not want the girl to live with the rest of the family. He says he doesn’t love or like the child and asks why she even brought her back from the bush; he wishes

she was left in the bush" (Transcript #2). Lastly, one woman stated that her partner treated her child badly but they separated (Transcript #7).

Lenz (2009) states that not all women are abandoned by their new partners; many women stay with these partners or "end up marrying another child soldier that they knew in captivity". However, she agrees that sexual activity and having additional children is one of the biggest problems facing these women. Lenz (2009) says that she has worked with over 150 female child soldiers in Uganda and the majority had a second child even though they do not want any more children.

They are constantly saying that but they don't know how to stop it.... 'We don't want to use a condom because our partners won't let us, we don't want to use the pill because we can't remember', the patch makes them bleed throughout the month and they don't like that either. And so they have a lot of options for reproductive health and stuff but they don't want to do them but at the same time they are not empowered enough to make choices. I think that is maybe the saddest thing about it, when they've come back and there has been a sense of dependency on the centres or on anybody that can help them and for themselves not to be able to feel like they're empowered to make a choice to use protection or something. And it is so sad because they just can't afford another child, many of them don't want them and many of them end up dying because they can't afford to feed them or get medical care for these kids (Lenz, 2009).

That is why empowerment projects are so critical in northern Uganda for these young women. As far as Lenz is aware, Empowering Hands is the only program specifically targeting

empowerment for female 'child soldiers' or heads of households. Other organizations may provide some empowerment training or techniques within their program but it is not a focus.

5.4.6 Rejection

Most of the literature asserts that young women and their children are not accepted by their families and communities and therefore (re)integration efforts have failed. However, there is a debate regarding what (re)integration actually means. Currently, (re)integration means *residing with family* as was mentioned in the literature review. The limited follow up research conducted with child soldiers in general consistently demonstrates that these individuals are not remaining with their families or in their communities. Twum-Danso (2009) states that children involved in conflict "are not going back to their families and if they do it does not last and they leave again". Peters (2009) supervised the collection of data in Sierra Leone and discovered that although it first appeared girls "were to some extent reasonably (re)integrated in the community, upon follow up 6 to 9 months later most of the girls had left the village where they tried to (re)integrate because they just couldn't stand the bullying". As Peters (2009) suggests, it may be "important to think about (re)integration as slightly broader than going back to their family or community".

You can also have the kind of (re)integration that is in a major town; although you come from a village you see if you can make a living in a provincial town. Maybe you have the opportunity to become an apprentice in a tailor shop or something like that and try to make a living there. In these towns not everybody knows each other, there is less social control, and people might not know you have been involved with the army or the rebels

so there are more opportunities to hide your past and to try to make a living just as anybody else (Peters, 2009).

Another important consideration is that families have also been traumatized “so the family that they had before the war is not the family they will find afterwards. The family will also be in crisis” (Twum-Danso, 2009). Therefore you cannot always assume that the best place for a child is with the family. It is not always the families who cause the disintegration of these family reunions; there are many reasons why the individual may not want to live with their family. As M.M. (2009) stated earlier, it is her impression that some of these children and youth are angry with their parents; others do not think it is fair that their money and resources go towards supporting their whole family (T.R., 2009); and many of these young women return empowered so they are more independent and outspoken which is at odds with traditional Acholi culture and could lead to conflict and tension within the home (Peters, 2009; T.R., 2009; Twum-Danso, 2009).

Therefore, literature stating that these individuals have not been accepted based upon whether or not they are residing in the family home or community may not be capturing the entire reality of the situation. The individual’s choice to leave the family home is an area that is not explored in the literature.

In the case where girls are actually ‘rejected’ by the family, Lenz (2009) explains that they are simply sent away to live on their own; they are not allowed in the household and have to live in a separate village area. Lenz (2009) clarifies that it is similar to North America in the sense that youth have arguments with their parents and never want to talk to them again, or one parent refuses to talk to their child, however they may still be able to attend family

functions. "The family may not welcome her in the house but may still welcome her in other ways" (Lenz, 2009).

Bradbury (2009) states that there are very few opportunities for women who are forced to live on their own and provide for herself and her child(ren). Most respondents revealed that these women would most likely move to a larger urban centre where there is more anonymity however they would most likely end up in prostitution (A.P., 2009; Burton, 2009; Peters, 2009; T.R., 2009; Twum-Danso, 2009). Twum-Danso (2009) explained a study based in Kampala, Uganda which argued that the street children of today are children of young women who had become sex workers when they returned from the LRA and were rejected by their fathers. On a more positive note, Bradbury (2009) suggests that women may rely on NGOs or do something entrepreneurial such as collecting firewood, or making charcoal or straw/grass brooms. If she is able to get enough money together for land she could then grow vegetables and sell them (Bradbury, 2009). Alternatively, the young woman may also return to her rebel husband; "it very clearly it is not a marriage out of love, but then to some extent the man takes some responsibility for the child and the young woman just tries to mother the child" (Bradbury, 2009; Peters, 2009). Another option, which is gaining in popularity and appears pretty effective, is for individuals experiencing similar situations to take up homes together (Lenz, 2009; Twum-Danso, 2009). This requires further exploration.

The above has highlighted the false assumption that the best place for a girl or young woman is residing with her parents or family. The whole structure of the family has changed and every individual in the family unit has experienced some form of traumatic experience from being displaced to witnessing horrific violence. As well, the individuals who are returning are

not children anymore; they are young adults who have changed in ways which may create tension, placing additional burden upon both the individual who has returned and the family.

More follow up studies need to be conducted to understand the true story of where these young women and children are residing. It seems an awful waste of time and resources if the NGOs are tracing family and then preparing and counselling them for a return that is only going to last a short time. Also, there are many individuals who have returned without NGO assistance; it is important to understand their experiences with (re)integration. If they have the same outcomes as children and youth who have gone through centres then what is the point of the NGOs being there in the first place?

This section also highlights the need to recognize the individual's right to choose and having those around her supporting and respecting that choice. When asked about support systems for these young women and children many of the participants commented upon the role of NGOs but also cautioned against relying on international organizations that may, at any time, be forced to suspend their operations or relocate to another crisis (A.P., 2009; Landry, 2009; Peters, 2009). As most NGOs only remain for 6-9 months before moving onto the next conflict, or 'sexy place', these organizations should be there as additional support that comes at the periphery to "fill the gaps [and strengthen] those local networks that were there before and will continue afterward" (Landry, 2009). Additionally, reception centres pose the risk of creating dependency as Lenz (2009) discovered that girls who went through a centre upon return used it as their immediate support system; "this has to do with dependency, not being empowered, not knowing if the community or their family is there to support them".

Similar to North America, the primary support for these young women is family, friends, peers or those in similar situations (Landry, 2009; Lenz, 2009; Peters, 2009). Lenz (2009) states that if the girl knows other 'child soldiers' are still alive they will try to link with them because they understand what they went through and are currently going through similar circumstances. Peters (2009) also suggests that much support is from women in general. As everybody has been affected by the war, women can share some similar experiences such as witnessing killings and rape, or being raped. M.M. (2009) stated that girls' strength is in each other and described her experience attending a training session for young mothers/heads of households:

[There were thirty of them and they start by playing games like kids.] All of a sudden you see their faces just light up playing games because that is something they cannot do at home, you don't have the time, you are either grinding millet or fetching water or cleaning the house or looking after the siblings.... [The next session you get them to talk about themselves with a song with clapping which would go like:] I am M.M./I was abducted/I stayed in the bush so many years/I was given to five men/I had kids with three of them/They all died/I have HIV/My mother died... etc. It was like an eye opener knowing that [the girls] were not alone. If any recovery program is to be successful you need to put these people together.

Lenz (2009) described a similar experience, a three day retreat for female former child soldiers.

It was the most amazing thing for these girls to connect with each other. Some of them didn't know each other were still alive, they hadn't seen each other for years. They met

each other, they met their babies. It was really crowded and noisy and loud with babies screaming but it was an amazing event for them because of how much they were able to share, talk and connect with each other. And I think it is extremely important that they have those opportunities (Lenz, 2009).

In addition to family and friends, existing sources of community support for girls include the following: churches and faith-based organizations, women's groups and elders (Bradbury, 2009; Landry, 2009; Lenz, 2009). Lenz (2009) described a current initiative where committees, composed of 10-12 volunteers ranging from religious leaders, teachers, youth, parents and social workers, are coming together to provide a child protection function.

5.5 Section 5: Reception Centres and NGOs

This section is premised with the recognition that there are many NGOs doing very good work in northern Uganda. The international community has responded to the situation with expertise and good intentions. However, there are some NGOs that waste needed resources. This section highlights the challenges faced by reception centres and NGOs and then explores criticisms leveled at the few doing poor work, as well as the general criticisms that underlie most international interventions. It must also be stated that most of the participants qualified their responses first by stating that international intervention and NGOs are needed and they are doing their best given the situation and constraints placed upon them.

5.5.1 Challenges Experienced by Reception Centres

The Paris Principles state that transit centres, commonly known as reception centres, should house children for a maximum of three days. Depending on the context however, "this

norm is often not strictly applied, especially in situations like Uganda where it has been determined that it is not recommendable to send children back to their home community if that home community is still greatly affected by recruitment and violence” (Landry, 2009). Additionally, where there has been a lot of displacement, family tracing cannot occur in three days, and sometimes it is just not advisable for children to be placed with their families right away.

A consequence of this norm, which makes these centres only a point of transit, is that they are not providing services and supports for the (re)integration of children hosted there, although some children are remaining in the centre for as long as six months to a year (Landry, 2009). In this case education, vocational training and other activities should be provided by taking more of a community approach (Landry, 2009).

Bradbury (2009) suggests that reception centres are under-resourced, understaffed and lack staff that are adequately trained to work with these children and youth. Additionally, they are unable to really affect change and address the trauma experienced by these children and youth in three weeks (Bradbury, 2009). Burton (2009) revealed that the two reception centres in Gulu are unable to keep the individuals long enough because of time limits on beds as a result of funding. Burton (2009) is of the opinion that it takes one to two years to fully (re)integrate an individual; before the community fully accepts them. Therefore, follow up programming is needed however, there are no resources.

5.5.2 Criticisms

What follows is a presentation of the greater and more fundamental criticisms of reception centres. These fundamental problems result in situations where reception centres

are either not helpful, which signifies a waste of resources, or potentially quite harmful to girls and young women returning.

Some psychosocial programs offered by reception centres focus on forgetting the past and moving on with their lives; those unable or unwilling are told they are possessed.

[These women] bonded with each other, they learned some interesting skills, they had festivals and exciting times, and it's like forget all of that? It is sad for them to forget because they even gave birth to their first baby, it might not have been under the circumstances they wanted, but that is part of their life too.... Really it is telling them to forget a huge amount of who they are as people and what's defined them (Lenz, 2009). It is impossible to forget and therefore programs focusing on this are unhelpful at best.

Another downfall for reception centres is the hostility and resentment it creates in the community which was previously discussed in the literature review. The majority of the population lives in absolute poverty and has been terrorized by these same children who are now receiving special treatment and greater opportunities. Child soldiers are given various material and financial support, training and skills, new clothes, etc., and so they enter the camps with more possessions than the residents of the camp which creates animosity (Bradbury, 2009; Burton, 2009; Landry, 2009; Lenz, 2009; M.M., 2009). This is a major concern for NGOs in these types of situations. If one is to uphold the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, it would necessitate treating children in armed conflict better than those in the general population. Article 6, Section 3 reads:

States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that persons within their jurisdiction recruited or used in hostilities contrary to the present Protocol are demobilized or otherwise released from service. States Parties shall, when necessary, accord to such persons all appropriate assistance for their physical and psychological recovery and their social reintegration (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2000).

This creates a dilemma for the international community as former child soldiers will receive greater privilege than children and youth who remained in the community. Lenz (2009) reveals that this situation has actually led to children who were not in the LRA coming to the centres and pretending to be former child soldiers so they can get the same services and material support. Unfortunately, as Twum-Danso (2009) articulates:

there is nothing you can do about it... because without these strategies these children are going to be on the streets, they are on the street anyway and they know how to use guns. They can easily become disaffected and they can remobilize again.... I think that because of that threat to society... there is a need for those kinds of strategies.

Alternatives to gearing programs and support to specifically benefit child soldiers will be discussed in Section 6.

In Lenz's (2009) opinion, reception centres are creating dependency rather than empowering individuals and the community. Material support has become the primary reason for wanting to go through the reception centres, not the support network or being able to (re)integrate more successfully (Lenz, 2009). Conversely, those children and youth who do

qualify for services are not registering because of the additional stigma which comes with being labelled a child soldier (Peters, 2009).

More serious criticisms are the actions or inactions on behalf of some centre staff which puts the child or youth at further risk of harm. A.P. (2009) reveals that some centres are not gender segregated and those that are do a poor job of separating the sexes. Therefore, girls may be further exposed to sexual victimization (A.P., 2009). Additionally, Lenz (2009) described how social workers within one particular centre were “humiliating the children, calling them names, putting them down, or saying they were stupid”.

One of the main causes attributed to the failure of (re)integration programs and reception centres is their ‘cookie cutter’ approach. Lenz (2009) states that every child going through the centre:

is going to basically be given the same type of treatment no matter how long they were in captivity or what they learned or didn’t learn or what they experienced. And they are almost all treated as if they did horrible, horrible things, and they need a lot of psychosocial supports and a ritual or something. Whereas it is not that case, there are very different things that happen to the kids.

Lenz (2009) further explains that around the world when children come back from fighting only a very small percentage are offered education or will want to go back to school.

Generally they offer them tailoring or carpentry or bicycle repair and it’s across the board, everywhere in the world, it’s the same type of skill... and this is not tapping into the numerous skills they learned in captivity.... So we are basically just creating a cookie-cutter approach to rehabilitation and not allowing any of these children to have

their own unique skill or sense of what they want to do when they come back (Lenz, 2009).

Lenz (2009) states that this belittles child soldiers and their experiences and tells them that this is the only thing they can offer their communities or their world. "I do not think it is fair no matter what country you are coming from or what kind of conflict you were in even if you voluntarily joined.... There are still ways that we can look at it differently and as humanitarians we should be looking at it differently for these kids" (Lenz, 2009).

Unfortunately, most internationally funded programs are about numbers: how many children go through the system and are 'cured' or productive citizens in their community (Lenz, 2009). Most donors require organizations to provide services to a certain number of children. Therefore, designing programs specifically for individuals is just not feasible.

Perhaps the greatest criticism of reception centres is that they create dependency and actually inhibit the (re)integration of children and youth. Lenz (2009) states that "over time [reception centres] became a source of dependency and the children didn't really ever learn how to (re)integrate back into society". The centres have become institutions which end up lasting a long time and inhibiting the type of family structure or support system you really need in a community (Lenz, 2009). Landry (2009) also replied that reception centres "go against (re)integration as a centre is an institution and it pulls away the child from his or her family" and creates a lifestyle that is quite different from their community as they are provided everything they need. Peters (2009) commented that there is a danger that these young women become institutionalized and find it very difficult to leave. This is exemplified by the number of girls who have been rejected by their family or community and go back to try and

live in the centre because “they feel like it is their only family. And that is not what you want to do, you don’t want that centre to become a family or a place for them always to run to” (Lenz, 2009).

5.5.2 Alternatives

Given the above lengthy critique of reception centres and the fact that “there is work out there demonstrating that children who did not go through reception centres are fine and perhaps have a better support system than some of the children who went through the centres” (Lenz, 2009), what is the alternative? Landry’s (2009) response is there are not a lot of alternatives. He states “you can criticize the centres but then what? If it is not where we keep the children, where else could we keep them?”

Peters (2009) and Landry (2009) both speak about foster or host families as alternative placements for children waiting to be (re)united with their families. This would provide a more normal environment with a family but also comes with limitations and additional concerns such as: the foster child is not as well taken care of, there is no personal connection and families may have difficulties welcoming a child labelled as a child soldier (Landry, 2009; Peters, 2009).

Landry (2009) suggests the provision of financial rewards however it “modifies the spirit of what a host family should be” turning it into a financial rather than humanitarian situation which could create tension within families. There are families with very big hearts who would welcome these kids however these individuals have experiences that make their behaviour outside what is socially acceptable which again places tension on the relationship (Landry, 2009). Peters (2009) also discusses how some organizations have experimented with group homes; there are obviously pros and cons to this situation as well.

In general, Lenz (2009) suggests that community based practices are quicker and more sustainable over the long run.

To keep a centre running is very, very expensive and obviously it takes a huge amount of staff and a lot of resources and those people don't want to lose their job ever. Whereas if you create programs that are already in the community and you empower the community members to work with the children, and then you empower the children to work with the children, the whole process of (re)integration and rehabilitation is going to be quicker and more sustainable (Lenz, 2009)

The additional benefit of community programming that is not specifically targeted towards former child soldiers is that it shows that the entire community is a priority, not just child soldiers (Landry, 2009). This "avoids sending the message to other children that if the conflict resumes they should join one of the fighting forces because the only way they will get support afterward is to certify that they were indeed a child soldier" (Landry, 2009). Also, by having programs accessible to a wider audience you are reaching vulnerable individuals but are refraining from labeling them as such. "This may create difficulties with collecting statistics but the importance should not be the statistics; it is to know that the services are there, they are accessible, they are affordable and they capture their needs and protect their rights" (Landry, 2009). These approaches are viewed as more successful in promoting the rights of girls and "calms down the frustration that you might find in communities" when the only individuals receiving attention are those who created the problems (Landry, 2009). Therefore, having programs reach a wider audience, rather than tailoring services to child soldiers, will actually facilitate (re)integration (Landry, 2009).

Additionally, Lenz (2009) is of the opinion that (re)integration and rehabilitation programs would be much more successful if they were to utilize the skills which they have already acquired. However this is difficult to do with the current constraints on funding and the international donor's obsession with numbers. Lenz (2009) states, "that's what I have been wanting to tap into, it's just extremely difficult to get donors to go into a program that will individualize support to children rather than just having 300 go through a tailoring course".

5.5.3 The International Community and NGOs

"Gulu has the highest number of NGOs in the whole world. You would think that with that number there wouldn't be any problems in Gulu or Acholiland" (M.M., 2009).

With the number of NGOs in northern Uganda, they deserve their own section. At the end of 2003 there were a handful of NGOs in northern Uganda but by 2006 there were around 500 (Lenz, 2009). Landry (2009) explains that "children in armed conflict are lucky in the sense that they do get a lot of attention compared to other categories of vulnerable children. It is a subject that has attracted a lot of attention from the media, from the public, and a lot of generosity from the donors".

As mentioned earlier, vocational training is one of the greatest criticisms of NGOs. Burton (2009) suggests that the benefits of vocational training surpass the learning of a trade as these youth gain purpose, self worth and learn how to work with others. Although Twum-Danso (2009) agrees that they need education and other opportunities like vocational training, she questions "how many hairdressers can a country have? And how many mechanical engineers can a country have? I think that the kinds of things that are taught to them need to

be looked at". M.M. (2009) is not as diplomatic. For young men "the NGOs let them learn to build bricks... making bricks is the order of the day", and for girls and young mothers:

the majority of these kids are designated to be tailors or stupid things... it's just tailoring, tailoring, and I'm thinking, what the heck, everybody is going to be a tailor?... In Gulu there is not a lot of business because.... most clothes are second hand rejects from the west... people don't make clothes because it is too expensive... and now you are training almost 30 girls who will all be tailors? (M.M., 2009).

Lenz (2009) comments about how sad it is when you walk through Gulu Town and "every tailor you see you know is a former child soldier. And they are all right next to each other and they have no real marketability because they are all doing that exact skill".

While some view vocational training as pointless given the lack of opportunity for employment, others have maintained they are simply insufficient. M.M. (2009) described one program as a 'big joke' as the girls were offered eight weeks of training and counselling and then provided 40,000 shillings, which is about \$30, to invest. The transcripts also revealed that those women who went through vocational training were either promised equipment or capital to start their small businesses and received nothing or too little to make a difference.

When international NGOs are offering programs and services in a country where the culture is much different than their own the issue of cultural sensitivity is bound to appear. One of the most common aspects of this debate is whether trauma is even applicable in these contexts. Twum-Danso states:

the way we approach trauma in Western countries is very different than the way it is approached in an African context where the focus is on the community.... The whole

concept of counselling in the African context doesn't work. And post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a very Western term and you can't just take it and transfer it to an African context although some of the symptoms do fit into the whole PTSD model. There is a need for psychological counselling but at the same time it's seen as alien to African communities [as] the family provides a healing ground for what they've been through. [Therefore] there needs to be a focus on community strategies to deal with things.

As well, Twum-Danso (2009) questions the extent these young women would be willing to talk to strangers about their problems and postulates that communities would probably discourage the girls from doing so as the family and community would rather keep their problems and issues within. Additionally, many NGOs have counsellors but once they leave, "how many psychologists or psychiatrists are in African countries anyways? Perhaps one or two in a whole country of 20 million people" (Twum-Danso, 2009).

M.M. (2009) also talked about the process of opening up in Acholi culture; "no one is just going to trust you, you are a foreigner, a muzungo [white person]". M.M. (2009) describes how when you first ask someone how they are they will always reply 'fine' regardless of how they are actually doing. So someone in an IDP camp who is starving and struggling with her daughter who has returned from the LRA, will reply that they are 'fine' in addition to being excited and happy that someone has come to visit. Therefore, to an 'outsider' it would actually appear that this woman and her family are doing well (M.M., 2009). In order to discover the truth one must spend time and eat the food that they have prepared because in Acholi culture "no matter how small, or however poor that person is, you have to eat something in their

house” (M.M., 2009). M.M. (2009) told of visiting an IDP camp, the woman “was so proud [that I sat down with her and ate her food]. So we ate, the food was so terrible, but hey that’s the culture”. After eating and spending time with the woman, she opened up and started crying:

‘my daughter went as a child with morals and groomed, she came back an animal in the real sense of the word.... There are so many in the camps that when they start fighting over a pen or something silly like water they fight to the death.... Every little thing you fight to the death and that is how they were raised in the bush’.... You send a white person to counsel, it doesn’t work (M.M., 2009).

Intimately tied to this issue of cultural sensitivity is lack of program responsiveness and how NGOs usually focus on bringing the participant to them, to receive their program because they need it, versus putting the focus where it belongs, on the individual. Landry (2009) states that there is sometimes too much emphasis on programs as there is an assumption that “all children need to come through us in order to be successful in their (re)integration”. For example, research and testimonies have established that girls are not registering in programs; the reasons could include that they are not aware, they were not allowed or they didn’t want to as they would be labeled or identified as a child soldier (Landry, 2009). However, when NGOs look at this issue they emphasize the program, how to get more people to this program versus exploring the actual needs of the children and youth and creating programming that is more responsive. “So the question is not ‘how do we ensure girls are coming to our program’ but how to adapt our approaches to support them in the community when they experience difficulties and discrimination?” (Landry, 2009).

M.M. (2009) again is critical when she states that the NGOs are only engaged in camouflage and not really benefiting anyone. She states “so they keep writing reports and fighting over the victims. When they get hold of a victim they don’t want to let loose because their report is going to come from here... But nobody cares really what is going to become of these kids, especially the child mothers” (M.M., 2009). P.C. (2009) also wondered where all of the international money was going because the people were definitely not the ones benefiting.

I would argue that there are some cases, way too many, in which NGOs are there specifically to make a profit. Burton (2009) agrees with this assessment stating that “others are there to make money which is sinful and unethical”. The Norwegian Council, an NGO currently in Uganda, has recently become much more active in discovering which NGOs are not credible and asking them to leave. Burton (2009) states that it is not difficult to discover who is there to make a profit as the warning sign is wasting money on things such as high administration costs and many vehicles and computers. Whereas the credible ones have a long-term presence, they are trusted and have a development focus (Burton, 2009). I still maintain that even these credible organizations have self-sustainability in mind. One of the questions asked to students repeatedly in the faculty of social work is, are you willing to work yourself out of a job? In essence this is what social work is all about; working to ameliorate and extinguish the oppression and marginalization that some groups in society and around the world experience. However this does not appear to be the focus of these NGOs. Lenz (2009) described how one of the reception centres is attempting to transition into some other entity because children are no longer returning from the LRA; they are in the DRC which makes it very difficult to escape.

With hundreds of NGOs remaining in Uganda, I question whether this transformation is actually needed.

M.M. (2009) suggests that NGOs are there to create good paying jobs for themselves; she discusses a friend of hers who went to northern Uganda to work for an NGO so she could save enough money to buy a house. This friend received a free car, house, house girl, phone and airtime, a monthly allowance for food and an extra \$500 bonus all on top of her salary. So this woman was able to live comfortably solely on the extras without even touching her salary (M.M., 2009). Compare that to M.M.'s aunt who works for the same organization: she is Acholi and therefore speaks the language, knows the culture, customs and traditions, she has worked in the field for many years and actually has a daughter who was abducted and stayed in the bush for eight and a half years. Therefore, this woman has actual lived experience with accepting a child back. However, because she does not have a degree she receives \$400 a month total. I agree with M.M. when she says "it is just a fact that the majority of people who go to work in these NGOs needn't have gone there because those NGOs could have used the local resources to do the jobs, in fact those [local] people would have done a much better job".

To make the situation more unbelievable from a humanitarian perspective is M.M.'s (2009) description of Gulu Town:

Gulu is very vibrant by the way... there are nightclubs, restaurants [saloons, massage places, saunas]... if you look from an outsider's perspective you think wow these people are happy, things are back to normal. NGOs need hotels so hotels are built, the NGOs need to eat so there are so many restaurants, the development is just focused on what

the NGOs want.... It is not for the local people. [The local people] are sleeping hungry but the expatriates are there and they are being fed and they are living life to the fullest.

This money could have been much better spent on local resources; it would have gone so much further and it would have empowered the people to assist their own people and make their own change. It would appear that the way NGOs are functioning may actually be inhibiting any progress the people could have made on their own and setting them further back when the time actually comes for the international community to move on to another location. Not every NGO has inhibited or created more harm than good however, when you come into a situation and make the people dependent upon the services you are offering while not educating or training the local community in how to deal with the issue, you are doing a disservice.

Additionally, the large international presence may actually be prolonging the conflict. In an earlier section the motivations of the government were discussed and explored. It was concluded that Museveni and the Ugandan government do not really have any motivation to end the war as there is no political pressure or repercussions. I propose that in addition to this, there is actually motivation to keep the conflict active because of all of the money being brought into the country, and specifically the government, with so many NGOs and expatriates needing food, entertainment and other services. With hundreds of NGOs one could imagine how profitable this actually is and the impact it may be having on the economy. End the war and what happens? 95% of the NGOs vanish.

Given the many criticisms of NGOs and programming in northern Uganda, what can be done to really improve upon the situation of young women and children? The next section explores some of the suggestions on how to improve (re)integration.

5.6 Section 6 - Suggestions for More Successful (Re)Integration

This section begins with some suggestions from participants on ways to improve the successfulness of (re)integration programs and then moves into a discussion on areas to focus advocacy efforts.

5.6.1 Suggestions for Success

Throughout the thesis, the traditional role of women has appeared as a potential barrier for (re)integration. Schomerus (2009) suggests that if the girl is more submissive it will be easier to (re)integrate; “if she acts humbly it will rebuild trust. The community says they watch them and if they are humble, polite and respectful to the elders they will accept them”. Therefore perhaps more of this type of training and counselling is needed for these women as preparation for entering society. I am sure this statement would create a strong reaction from many people working in these contexts; however, one has to question the function and intent of international NGOs. Although many people do not condone patriarchal societies, does the international community have the right to impose a different or ‘better’ social structure upon the society in which they are working? It is a difficult and controversial question which I am not able to answer. For the purpose of this thesis, the goal of (re)integration is to assist individuals gain acceptance with their families and in their communities. NGOs then should be facilitating

these reunions, not inhibiting these young women because they do not believe that the current patriarchal social structure is correct or ideal.

Other suggestions for more successful (re)integration include: parenting skills and support networks for young mothers (Lenz, 2009); more vocational training and education (Burton, 2009); programs stressing peace-building, empowerment or leadership (Lenz, 2009); follow up programming (Burton, 2009); sensitization of teachers and other community professionals (Bradbury, 2009; Burton, 2009); and boarding schools specifically designed for child soldiers (M.M., 2009).

In regards to additional vocational training, Burton (2009) states that these value added programs can only go so far because real businesses compete for the jobs. This is perhaps an area in which the Ugandan government could have a larger role. Personally, I believe that focusing resources on building homes and creating gardens and crops would have a much greater impact due to the fact that Acholi society is based on a sustenance economy.

As for sensitization of teachers and community members, Burton (2009) states that teachers need to be more charitable and take extra care of these children as they are actually more influential than parents. Although he acknowledges that teachers are currently undertrained, underpaid, have no furniture or supplies, have too many kids and can therefore not provide the extra care (Burton, 2009). Professionals such as public health nurses need to be sensitized as well because youth will turn to them, not because they are sick but, because they are friendly and will listen. Bradbury (2009) also suggests more education surrounding blame and responsibility and Burton (2009) recommends the provision of counselling training for people who are familiar with traditional cultural knowledge and have the ethnic

background. I completely support this suggestion and emphasize that ideally it should be Acholis helping Acholis.

Programs focused on peace-building, empowerment or leadership training are going to be the most successful as children “come back with such low self-esteem and are told that they are nothing and they cannot do anything” (Lenz, 2009). It is extremely important that they have a voice in the peace process and reconstructing their lives in order to be empowered and regain their self-esteem, role in the community, and sense of who they are and what they can do (Lenz, 2009).

M.M. discussed the (re)integration of her cousin who spent eight and a half years with the LRA. As she had family abroad who provided her extra financial and social support, she was able to remove herself from the context of the war and receive more intense counselling. She is now attending school in Kampala and flourishing. Whenever Gulu is even mentioned she has anxiety attacks. As many children and youth in Uganda attend boarding school, M.M. (2009) suggests giving the children of the north that same opportunity; “send them to proper schools and let them pursue higher education”.

[Send them away from the place in which they were abducted and] forced to hang their parents or to beat their parents to death.... These kids need a break... they need to be uprooted from that area, from northern Uganda and taken elsewhere, and counselled and given a new life. If they want to change their name so be it. They are left in the actual area where atrocities, such deadly things, happened to them and they are forced to see it every single day and live through it every single day (M.M., 2009).

M.M. (2009) goes a little bit further and suggests creating a boarding school specifically for children who have returned from the LRA where they do not feel ostracized, second guessed or looked down upon. "Let it be a proper school with facilities: feed them, house them, give them education, and give them counselling over a period of time before you let them move into the community" (M.M., 2009).

Personally I think this is a good suggestion. Although the last section explained the current debate regarding reception centres as institutions and backward in the attempt of (re)integration into the community, boarding schools are actually quite common in Uganda. These boarding schools would provide the youth many of the benefits that have been discussed throughout this thesis: a place to live while also receiving some form of counselling, the mutual support and understanding from those in a similar situation, and real education versus vocational training. The youth would be provided the opportunity to decide what they would like to study and build upon the strengths they have already acquired throughout their life. Even though this would be quite costly, simply compare it to the sum of money being wasted on inappropriate or insufficient programming in northern Uganda. While children and youth are away at boarding school more pressure could be placed on the government to actually end the war and begin restructuring and developing the north so when these youth return there will be opportunities for them and the people will be less hostile towards them.

5.6.2 Advocacy Efforts

The number one area for advocacy in regards to children in conflict remains gendering the disarmament, demobilization and (re)integration strategies and allowing girls and young women to participate and qualify for (re)integration support regardless of their actual role

within the rebel faction. It is still the case in many conflicts that in order to qualify for assistance the individual must turn in a gun and in many cases the young women and girls do not have their own guns and are therefore left out. (Peters, 2009; Twum-Danso, 2009).

Another important area for advocacy will be empowering and giving women a voice in their own lives and in the community (Lenz, 2009; T.R., 2009). Society needs to respect a woman's right to choose her own destiny. T.R. (2009) suggests that there needs to be efforts in raising the respectability of being single, which is already occurring in northern Uganda simply as a result of how many men have died. If women do not want to marry they shouldn't have to. They should be able to (re)integrate or settle wherever they want, not necessarily with their family or in their community. And women should never be forced to marry the perpetrators of sexual violence (T.R., 2009).

The final area of advocacy rests with the international community and funding constraints. Although there is general consensus that programs that are more inclusive to the general community are more beneficial as compared to those that specifically target child soldiers, Landry (2009) explains they are difficult to implement due to the desires of funders. Donors want their money to benefit those in greatest need, which is repeatedly demonstrated to be child soldiers. Therefore, it takes some additional effort to convince them that programs specifically geared towards child soldiers create tension and frustration within the community (Landry, 2009). However, Landry (2009) explains that the donors are not inhuman and with negotiation they will usually compromise with 50% former child soldier and 50% community children as beneficiaries. This approach "is gaining more ground" and creates "a more holistic impact and avoids stigmatizing children" (Landry, 2009). However this still necessitates

collecting statistics and labeling. Similarly, international donors must be presented research on outcomes demonstrating the value of individualized programming as compared to 'cookie cutter' approaches.

Landry (2009) cautions how we portray girls and women to international donors; it is always extremely drastic in order to attract attention and more generosity. "As a result, the perception at the community level of a girl who comes back from the armed forces is that automatically we can assume that she has lost her virginity, that she has been exploited sexually, that she's now a prostitute" (Landry, 2009). If this is not the case, she will find it difficult to convince the community otherwise. Therefore, by "limiting our understanding to the most catastrophic sort of profiles then we sort of gear the kind of expectations the communities and families may have towards what those children probably experienced which could be detrimental" (Landry, 2009).

This is definitely an area that we should be exploring as international social workers acting in the capacity of an advocate. There needs to be a greater shift in mentality on behalf of the donors but also on who is presenting information to the donors. The whole intent is to assist young women and children not create additional barriers.

6.0 Discussion

Based on the findings of this thesis, section six discusses whether girls and young women are in fact invisible in research and formal processes of DDR and (re)integration. It then moves onto whether this demographic is actually more difficult to (re)integrate, and what they are actually being (re)integrated into. The section then summarizes the major findings and contributions to the literature and ends with a summary of the challenges facing successful (re)integration programs.

6.1 Are Girls and Young Women Invisible?

This remains a contentious issue as most participants agreed with the literature stating that women remain invisible in research and programming whereas Landry (2009) revealed that this is perhaps the “sexiest issue of all of the dimensions of children and conflict”. Within one year in West Africa there were over 30 research projects and “65% of them were interested in the particular experience of girls” (Landry, 2009). However, despite all of the effort, energy and investment, the international community has not moved forward on understanding their experiences or, more importantly, learning how to respond (Landry, 2009). Most research has focused on the anthropological dimension without bridging it to action and creating change. Therefore, the gap is not in research but in disseminating and translating the findings into effective approaches, programs, strategies and policy.

Many participants also commented on DDR strategies ignoring or failing to validate the experiences and needs of girls, as girls do not have guns to turn in and therefore do not qualify for assistance. Twum-Danso (2009) states that “not only have girls been invisible in the war

places, when it comes to DDR, they have been overlooked and marginalized". T.R. (2009) states that when DDR processes recognize girls it is in the context of dependency while ignoring their role as combatants. A.P. (2009) also states that girls are typically cast as victims and not perpetrators therefore when they go back to their communities they are often cleansed of their sexual victimization whereas boys are cleansed of their violence. Thus, traditional ceremonies may not be very helpful for the girls who committed acts of violence. Additionally, Bradbury (2009) revealed that in all of his time spent in Uganda he has never witnessed a girl or young woman go through the traditional reconciliation ceremony. Overall it appears as though women remain invisible in practice.

6.2 Are Girls and Young Women with Children More Difficult to (Re)Integrate?

Many of the participants were of the opinion that girls are more difficult to (re)integrate. Bradbury (2009) states that the process of demobilization and reconciliation favours males as females suffer greater stigmatization due to being unfairly tagged for greater responsibility. It is also the consensus that young women suffer greater hardship because of rape and having children out of wedlock. Boys receive more opportunities and are forgiven more quickly.

I am of the opinion that children and youth, regardless of their gender, face challenges upon return and that they most likely experience similar success with their families and communities. Because girls and young women return with children, I believe it is probably initially a little more difficult for families, specifically fathers, to accept them. However, as P.C. (2009) mentioned earlier, fathers have no choice as so many girls have come home with children; it is almost expected and parents are elated that their daughters have come back

alive. Also, as the society or culture in general appreciate and love children so much, I can actually see this as perhaps fostering the reconciliation of these girls and their parents. The majority of the young women from the transcripts revealed that their child(ren) actually lived with her parents; one woman even said that her family was so happy that she returned with children because she was the first of her siblings to give birth. Perhaps more should be explored about the benefits of returning with a child in regards to being reunited with parents and families.

The greatest disadvantage of returning home with children is the lack of programs and opportunity. As Lenz (2009) explained, young women are given the choice of education for themselves or their child(ren) and most women will give that opportunity to their child. Additionally, women who may have the opportunity and motivation to return to school will find it especially difficult because of the lack of child care available.

Overall, I do not view girls and young women with children as particularly difficult to (re)integrate however, I do recognize that there is a lack of opportunity which will have a great impact upon their lives. Therefore, this remains a concern which must be addressed.

6.3 What Are Young Women and Children Being (Re)Integrated Into?

I chose social ecology theory as I believe that I do not have the right to impose my own values and assumptions upon another culture or society. This thesis set out to explain the experiences of girls in the LRA and upon return to their families and/or communities while also exploring the society into which they are being (re)integrated, an area consistently left out of the literature.

Unfortunately, this thesis is unable to offer a description of the type of society which awaits former child soldiers. The Acholi culture and society has changed quite drastically and continues to change as a result of conflict, displacement, lack of resources and opportunities, and even role reversals in the power structure. The lives of those in IDP camps are vastly different than those in villages and towns. The supports which exist for these young people, the opportunities for school or work, the structure of the family (both parents killed or died, one parent, siblings, return to become the head of the household), returning with a child, and whether families are religious and/or traditional are all factors which shape the context of return.

What can be taken from this is that programs need to be flexible. Individuals working with these children and youth need to be able to assess the context and plan appropriate interventions.

6.4 Contribution to the Literature

The following is a summary of the unique findings from this thesis that are absent in the literature and form the basis of the contribution to the existing body of knowledge.

6.4.1 The Varied Lived Experiences of Girls

The girls and young women experienced quite different realities depending upon their role in the LRA as well as where they were based or lived. If the girls stayed in Uganda they experienced greater hardship with continuous marching, fighting and death. Whereas if the girls were sent to established bases in Sudan they lived a relatively 'normal' life; a life perhaps better than those living in IDP camps. They were married, raised their children, grew

vegetables and bartered in the local market; they even had celebrations and festivals. There were schools, medical centres, and according to one woman, Kony himself would grow and pick herbs for people who were sick (Transcripts).

The experiences of girls and young women are often viewed as universal and include being raped by multiple men or labeled as 'sex slaves'. Some of the participants noted that this may be counterproductive to sensitization efforts as families and communities will assume the worst, creating more stigmatization than perhaps is warranted. This thesis revealed that many girls did not perceive that they were raped as it was their 'husband' who raped them, and there is no account of women and girls being raped by multiple men.

One unexpected factor was how close the girl or young woman was to Kony. If she was a wife of Kony or another high commander, (re)integration may be, counter-intuitively, easier as members of the community try to befriend the individual to gain some false sense of security. Overall, these girls bring very different experiences back with them from the LRA and are impacted by very different barriers and challenges to (re)integration.

6.4.2 Acquired Skills

Some of these girls come back with remarkable skills based on their jobs within the LRA that would be of great benefit to their community. These skills include nursing, administration, public speaking, child rearing, farming, and bartering. More needs to be done to build upon and utilize these skills for the benefit of society.

6.4.3 Support, Reception Centres and NGOs

It was discovered that if the returned individual were to make it home on their own it was the family which was the greatest support followed by peers and existing support systems

within the community. For those who had returned to a reception centre it was the centre itself where these girls and young women would turn to upon experiencing hardship. This highlights the risk of reception centres creating dependency and further inhibiting (re)integration. Therefore, alternatives such as foster care and youth run households, where individuals experiencing a similar situation reside together, need to be further explored and developed.

Participants also reported the need for programs which are more inclusive to the entire community. These programs would pacify the resentment caused by programs specifically developed for child soldiers as well as benefit every war affected individual. The challenge resides with donors who remain in the mindset that funds must target those in the greatest need. Therefore, this mentality must be changed as well as the way these children and youth are represented and portrayed in the media and to the donors.

6.5 Summary of Challenges

The following is a summary of the greatest challenges with current (re)integration strategies for young women returning with children.

6.5.1 Assumptions

It was surprising to discover that many people who work with these individuals do not even ask about their experiences or when they do their questions specifically target their role as combatant or 'sex slave'. Planners and researchers assume that all of the girls and women were raped and forced to commit horrendous acts of violence. This is not always the case. As a consequence, these girls and young women are portrayed in a very unfavourable light to their

families and communities which may be more harmful than helpful if these young women did not suffer such a fate while in the LRA. As well, the skills they have acquired are never explored.

6.5.2 Universal Approaches to (Re)Integration

(Re)integration strategies employ universal 'cookie cutter' approaches to children and youth returning from the LRA. There are many disadvantages to this type of programming including: providing psychosocial counselling for those who do not need it or do not believe it in (they may be uncomfortable as it is not traditionally how they deal with problems); pressuring returnees to submit to cultural traditions in which they do not believe and therefore have the potential to be harmful; and providing every youth the same trade or skill which further sets them apart from their community and does not truly impact upon successful outcomes as there are no opportunities for employment and no resources for self-employment.

6.5.3 Lack of Follow-Up

There is absolutely no follow-up for those who have been (re)integrated in an attempt to either: gauge the successfulness of the intervention; or provide ongoing assistance or guidance for those experiencing challenges.

7.0 Implications and Recommendations

The following section details the recommendations proposed by the researcher in strengthening (re)integration strategies. These recommendations are based upon the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis: social ecology and empowerment theories. Empowerment is desperately needed in northern Uganda on every level mentioned in the ecological theory. Individuals need to be empowered to make the decisions which impact their lives; however, this in isolation would prove useless unless other levels of influence are also taken into consideration. Empowerment efforts therefore need to strengthen families and communities so they are able to take responsibility for these individuals and provide meaningful opportunities to participate in society. Finally, the government must provide the opportunity for northerners to have a voice and agency not only in their own communities but also on the national stage.

7.1 Individualized Programming

(Re)integration programs must be individualized in order to provide children and youth the greatest opportunity to succeed in life. An alternative to creating individualized skill based programming could be sending these individuals to a proper school where they can choose their own future (Lenz, 2009) or creating boarding schools specifically for these children where they can receive not only an education but also continued support (M.M., 2009).

Children and youth must be provided a voice and be actively involved in planning their future. This not only applies to education and employment but also in regards to where they would like to reside. Children and youth should not be forced to return to their parents and

families under the assumption that this is the best place for them. It is potentially much more harmful than helpful. Alternative living arrangements must be further explored.

Programming must be flexible and take into consideration unique experiences, skills, strengths, and individual, family and community characteristics which impact (re)integration efforts. The specific factors that contribute to the success or failure of such reunions must seriously be explored and integrated into planning and policy. As well, the changing Acholi structure of family and community must always be considered and programs must be responsive to these changes.

7.2 Services and Supports

Reception centres should be restricted to providing shelter, family tracing services and assessments of living arrangements. While this is occurring the child or youth must be provided adequate medical care and receive referral to community programming and supports.

Community programming must be inclusive to all community members to avoid labeling and stigmatizing the returning child or youth to a greater extent than already exists. These programs should focus on empowerment and leadership training to improve upon their self-esteem and sense of agency within their communities. Also, these programs should strengthen the skill sets they already have and explore opportunities within the community for these individuals to use those skills.

Families must be provided more assistance and follow up upon receiving these children and youth back. We must not forget that families have also suffered tremendously as a result of the war and terror inflicted upon the general population. They too require additional support.

The returned young women must be connected to one another and allowed the opportunity to organize themselves in order to: provide support to each other, learn parenting skills, have a greater voice in their community, address structural challenges together, and perhaps be encouraged to initiate some form of child care system. One of the greatest needs for these young women is child care. Without child care it is extremely difficult for these individuals to work or go to school. Elders and other women in the community are potentially an excellent untapped resource that could be used for support, teaching parenting skills and providing child care. They could also act as role models and assist in the dispelling of negative stereotypes and myths surrounding these young women.

7.3 Restitution and Development

Although not from the findings, I believe that these youth could be an integral part of the reconstruction and rebuilding phase of northern Uganda.

It was briefly discussed that returning children and youth are seen as victims; they had no agency in committing these crimes and they should therefore just try to forget what happened and they will be forgiven. This is very unhelpful for many youth who do not want to forget about their life in the bush and for those who feel great responsibility for actions they took and crimes or atrocities they committed. I believe that if children and youth were to pay restitution, in the sense that they contribute their labour to rebuilding and developing the villages, they would demonstrate to the community that they have skills and want to be part of the community. This may have greater impact upon both the child and community as compared to traditional restitution, Mato Oput, as it demonstrates to the community that they have skills which will benefit society and it will not cost the individual anything (i.e. a goat is

needed for Mato Oput). The children and youth benefit by participating in a project where they will work with others, learn skills and feel like they are giving back to the community.

7.4 NGOs

Although many NGOs are doing wonderful work in northern Uganda, there are others that are creating dependency resulting in a sense of helplessness which only contributes to the problems facing northern Ugandans. I believe that NGOs in general must change their focus from providing services to strengthening the capacity of existing support networks and local resources for these children and youth. Local citizens must be empowered to look after their own people and provided the means to do so. The funding associated with the hundreds of NGOs currently in northern Uganda could be much better spent on training the local people who will be able to provide culture-specific support.

7.5 The Ugandan Government

More international attention and pressure must be placed on the government of Uganda to end the war. Many believe that if Kony were to be arrested or killed during battle, the LRA would disarm; there has been rumour that a faction of the LRA wants to demobilized however there are many soldiers and commanders who are fearful of Kony's spiritual powers. Until this occurs northern Ugandans will fear returning to their villages. Regardless of civilian's fear for safety, northerners are being forced to relocate back to their communities from IDP camps. All of these individuals should be provided assistance during this relocation for building their homes and establishing gardens and crops. Also, for those who do not know where their

land is, there must be some method established for redistributing the available land and property to ensure everyone has a place to live and can sustain themselves.

The government must change its perspective on the north, take responsibility for its citizens and show some vested interest in quality of life and development. The government must prioritize the north in terms of services and resources and strive toward the equality of all Ugandan citizens. These services and resources should include: education, development, employment, homes and land. Massive national investment from the government must occur in order for northerners to rebuild their lives and to *initiate* the building of trust.

Without this investment the north will always distrust the government. The issues and concerns present before the 23 year war will continue without resolve thereby perpetuating conflict between the north and the government.

7.6 Areas in Need of Further Exploration

The following is a list of the topics that remain unexplored and have the potential to greatly impact policy and programming. I had hoped to provide some explanation of the first two topics listed, children of rebel fathers and factors affecting successful (re)integration, however this thesis was unable to uncover significant findings as the literature and knowledge simply do not exist. I hope to have the opportunity to conduct my own field research on one of these areas for a future Ph.D. dissertation.

1. Children of rebel fathers – experiences and challenges;
2. Specific characteristics of families and the girls themselves which would predict successful (re)integration (mostly conjecture here);

3. Further exploration of what happens to those who fail to '(re)integrate' and therefore make a life on their own;
4. Exploration of alternative living arrangements (alternative (re)integration – not residing with family or in community of origin; living with other former child soldiers; living with rebel husbands, etc);
5. Follow up to gauge the actual impact of reception centres, vocational training and other programs and services for this demographic; and
6. Alternatives to reception centres.

8.0 Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Not being able to travel and conduct interviews in northern Uganda made gathering a complete picture of the context difficult. I have simply to rely on information from third parties. I did my best given the situation and feel that the range of perspectives presented in this thesis provide a pretty accurate picture of the situation facing girls and young women who have returned from the LRA.

Although it appears that this research was conflicting it makes sense considering the naturalist paradigm in which reality is socially constructed based upon experience. Every individual interviewed had different experiences and expertise within and outside of Uganda and therefore their opinions obviously differed. I believe that it is all accurate and serves to highlight the complexity of the situation and the need for programs and services to be flexible and responsive to individual needs.

The majority of the participants consented to having their identities and opinions revealed throughout the thesis. Only the participants who are Ugandan felt their identity needed to be protected. This is due to their continued involvement in Uganda and the highly political nature of the situation. Unfortunately it is difficult to anticipate who would read this thesis and any negative impact it may have on their work in Uganda. For this reason, pseudonym initials are used in place of their names.

9.0 Applications to Social Work Practice

This thesis has demonstrated that it is important to understand the complexity of the context when planning and delivering programs and services. It has served to highlight that information can be sensationalized or extreme experiences normalized in areas of conflict. This is important in the Canadian context as immigrants and refugees continue to choose Canada as their new home. Social workers in Canada rely upon research and literature conducted in these areas to inform their own practice and therefore it is important to realize that these studies may have their own bias and may be representing the most extreme cases. Overall it is important to treat each individual as such with deep exploration of experience and needs but also skills and strengths. Professionals should never impose their own assumptions and beliefs upon those they are intending to support. Also imperative for social work practice is the philosophy of empowerment and allowing space for individuals to make decisions that will impact upon their own lives and the well-being of those around them.

In addition to providing counselling and programs to these individuals in a national or international context, this thesis underscores the importance of social workers being informed

of what is occurring internationally in regards to human rights violations. Social workers have an obligation to advocate for vulnerable individuals, in this case girls and young women with children, as well as the wider Acholi community. Governments should be held to account for their actions against their own civilian populations. Without strong advocacy these atrocities will continue around the world.

10.0 Conclusion

Although the LRA has moved out of Uganda and now terrorizes the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the effect of the conflict is still felt in northern Uganda. Many children and youth remain missing and the population remains terrified that the LRA will return. Children are not currently returning home; they are stuck in a country they do not know, are brainwashed into thinking their families and communities will never forgive them and most likely kill them upon their return, and the messages of amnesty and forgiveness are too far away to be heard. These children will not be returning unless the LRA are forced out of the Congo and back into Uganda or the LRA are finally defeated. Until that day, there is much work that needs to be done to prepare for their arrival and inevitable need to (re)integrate back into Acholi culture; whatever that actually looks like.

This thesis has served to provide a detailed description of the life experienced by girls and young women while in the LRA, the context in which these individuals are returning, and the current strategies in place to aid their (re)integration. Inquiry into these areas has revealed some interesting findings and contributed to gaps in the literature.

Much of the existing research serves only to criticize (re)integration programs as being unsuccessful or even harmful, without providing the context in which (re)integration is occurring or recommendations on how to improve outcomes. Additionally, it appears as though researchers are only interested in discovering experiences related to fighting and being forced into marriage or acting as 'sex slaves'. This results in the ignorance of some experiences with the LRA, including those times when they enjoyed themselves or learned practical skills which could assist their (re)integration and acceptance within society. Also, it perpetuates the idea that these girls and young women are victims who lack any agency. Some of the findings demonstrate that this may not be the case: many young women were commanders; thousands of young women became wives and mothers who were taken to Sudan where they could raise their children and live 'normal lives'; and many young women chose to remain with their 'rebel husbands' upon leaving the LRA. From some accounts, the lives of girls and young women in the LRA may not be as horrendous as depicted in the literature. Some of these individuals may have actually experienced greater independence and agency within the rebel group as compared to traditional Acholi society in addition to having more resources than the general population who found themselves in IDP camps.

11.0 Appendices

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT FOR EXPERTS/KEY INFORMANTS

Title of Research Project: Exploring the Reintegration Process for Child Soldiers: A Case Study of Young Women and Their Children in Gulu, Northern Uganda.

Project Investigator: Allison Martin

Project Committee Members: (Faculty Advisor) Ginette Lafreniere, Robert Ame, and Lea Caragata

Ginette Lafreniere's Contact Information: (519)884-0710 x 5237; glafreniere@wlu.ca

Introduction:

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled: Exploring the reintegration process for child soldiers: A case study of young women and their children in Gulu, northern Uganda. The purpose of this research study is to examine the reintegration process of young women and their children returning to their families and communities from rebel armies. Allison Martin is conducting this study as partial fulfillment of her Masters in Social Work degree in the concentration of community planning, policy and organization, at Wilfrid Laurier University in Kitchener, Ontario.

The objective of this study is to gain a thorough understanding of the complex process of reintegrating children from rebel armies back into their communities, with a special focus on young women and their children. This includes gaining an understanding of not only the needs of children but their strengths and aspirations, the formal and informal structures within their communities (i.e. culture, social norms, etc.), and the current reintegration process.

Benefits and Risks:

This research will provide participants an opportunity to discuss their experiences and make suggestions regarding the policies and procedures surrounding the reintegration of young women and their children returning from rebel armies; a group that is consistently absent in the existing research. The results could have a great impact on regions experiencing civil war by informing reintegration centres on how to modify existing programs to be more responsive to the needs of these young women and their children, as well as the needs of families and communities in accepting these children and youth back. More successful reintegration programs will provide greater opportunities for education and employment, making these young women and children productive members of their communities. Within the Canadian context, this research may assist social workers provide appropriate assistance to refugees or immigrants from war-torn countries.

The information you provide in response to the questions might be upsetting, it is important to understand that you are not required to share any sensitive details or stories. If you do become upset, please feel free to move on to the next question or end your participation in the study. Support resources will be provided at the end of the interview.

Description of the Research:

You are being asked to participate in one interview lasting approximately 1-1½ hours. There will be 10-15 participants who either have experience working with "child soldiers" in Uganda, or those who were born in Uganda and are now residing in Canada. The latter will be knowledgeable about Acholi culture and social structure, and therefore will inform the research project on the context in which these young

women children are being (re)integrated. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed by the project investigator. In cases where participants do not consent to being audio taped, or the interview is being conducted over the phone, detailed notes will be taken by the interviewer.

Participant's Initials _____

Confidentiality

You will remain anonymous, any personal information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. Only the principal researcher will have access to personal data which will be kept in locked storage. The project committee may have access to the transcribed data however the notes will only be identified by a code number. After one year the tapes and written notes will be destroyed. With the participant's permission quotations from this interview may be published as part of the thesis however such quotations will not contain any information that would identify the participant.

Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary and there will be no consequence for deciding not to participate. You have the right to refuse to answer any question and you can withdraw your participation from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefit. For participating in this study you will receive a \$15 gift certificate to Williams Coffee Pub. There is no consequence for withdrawing from the study prior to its completion. Any information provided up to this point in the interview will be included in the study unless the participant requests otherwise, at which time the audio tape and notes will be destroyed.

Contact

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Bill Marr, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-0710, extension 2468.

Feedback and Publication

The results of the research will be written up in a Master's thesis to be presented in the spring of 2009. The final report will be available shortly thereafter. If you would like a copy of the results please make a request at the time of the interview or email Allison at mart0111@wlu.ca or allimart@gmail.com or call (519)777-0181.

Consent

I have read and understood the purpose of this study. I understand that my identity will remain anonymous, that I can refuse to answer any questions, and that I can withdraw at any time. I have had all questions pertaining to participating in this study answered to my satisfaction.

Participant's Name _____

Participant's Signature _____

Please initial if you agree to be audio taped _____

Please initial if you agree to be quoted without identifying information _____

Interviewer's Signature _____

Date _____

Semi-structured interview guide for key informants.

1. Can you briefly tell me about the structure of families and communities, and any cultural norms or beliefs that would positively or negatively impact on young women returning from the rebel army with children?
2. What is your understanding of what young women and their children had been through with their involvement with the rebel army?
3. What challenges do these women and children experience when they return from the army? What do they struggle with?
4. What strengths do these young women and children return to their communities with? How can the community use the skills and knowledge they gained through involvement with the rebel army constructively? (i.e. to better the community).
5. What is the role of reception centres? What are the good and not so good aspects of these centres?
6. What are the attitudes and perceptions of these young women's families upon return from the rebel army with a child?
 - a. In what circumstances are families accepting? What normally happens if families accept the young woman and her child?
 - b. In what circumstances are families rejecting? What happens if the families reject the young woman and her child? Where does she go? What does she do?
 - c. In your opinion, what can be done to facilitate the (re)integration of these young women and their children with their families?
7. What are the attitudes and perceptions of the wider community in regards to these women and children?
 - a. In what circumstances are communities accepting? What happens if they are accepted? Are they involved and offered opportunities to participate in the community like other children and youth?
 - b. In what circumstances are communities rejecting? What happens to the young woman and child if this occurs? What are the implications? What opportunities do they have? Where do they go?
 - c. In your opinion, what can be done to facilitate the (re)integration of these young women and their children into their community?
8. Who is available to offer them support once they are in the community?
9. Are there any other ways that families, communities, reception centres, and the young women themselves, contribute to the process of (re)integrating?

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