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Understanding Former ‘Girl Soldiers’

**Central Themes in the Lives of Formerly Abducted Girls in post-
Conflict Northern Uganda**

Allen Kiconco

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ABSTRACT

Despite the heightened focus on the effects of war on girls, they are still being inappropriately grouped under the larger rubric of women or females. Since the distinctions in girls' and women's war experiences are not yet well understood (McKay, 2006), this research argues that gender analysis is crucial to effective development as it relates to young soldiers. It also advocates a distinct analytical focus on girls who exit armed forces as young women (at times as a result of having children). One must go beyond the universalistic narrative of women's experiences of armed conflict and political violence and focus on the experiences of specific categories of females. Therefore, the girls' war experiences as young and, later, older girls require specific attention. This attention will both contribute to a balanced debate on young soldiers participating directly in armed conflicts and address the issues and needs which are important to the reintegration of girl soldiers exiting fighting forces. The present study is about formerly abducted girls in Acholi sub region, northern Uganda. As adolescents and teenagers, they were abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army and many returned to their communities with children fathered by the fighters. This thesis systematically looks at their socio-economic reintegration process, experiences and progress over the years. Through a series of 57 in-depth and 12 group interviews, this qualitative study explores long-term reintegration from the participants' perspectives. The study identifies and analyses the central themes in their lives, including: physical and mental scars of abduction and life in captivity, stigmatisation, marriage complexities, and economic hardships. To date, the growing body of reintegration literature has focused on the first one or two years after exiting an armed group, and long-term reintegration studies are still limited. Therefore, through these themes, the thesis contributes to the conceptualisation of reintegration and understanding of the participants' past and current life situations.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Child soldiering has not always been perceived as an issue affecting girls; only recently has research given attention to the realities of girl soldiering. Evidence has shown that like boys, girls comprise a significant proportion of adolescent and teenage soldiers involved with armed groups globally (see Machel, 1996; Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2004:7–10; MacKay & Mazurana, 2004; Paris Principles, 2007; Hobson, 2005).¹ Although there are numerically fewer girls than boys among child soldiers, their numbers are still significant, and their experiences distinct. Despite this increased attention, the literature is still lacking when it comes to their lived experience of war and reintegration (Tonheim, 2010:18; Wessells, 2007b:3). We have little sense of the magnitude, incidence, and nature of the violence, trauma and suffering, or the resilience, of girl soldiers in post-conflict situations. This thesis attempts to contribute to understanding the involvement of girls and young women in the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) conflict in Northern Uganda and to shed light on their experience of post-war reintegration.

According to the Paris Principles, a child soldier/‘a child Associated with an Armed force or Armed group (CAAF/A)’ is, ‘any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities’ (2007: 7). This definition includes girls who are recruited forcibly as well as those who join armed groups voluntarily. The focus in this thesis is on girl abductees—female adolescents and teenagers that are forcibly recruited into armed groups to aid their military work (I further discuss the controversy surrounding terminologies used to describe female adolescents that participate in armed conflicts in Chapter Three).

Official English terminologies and classifications do not always correspond to local perceptions. I recognise that cultural meanings of *childhood* and *girlhood* may diverge from the Paris Principles definition. The notion of *childhood* that informs international policy (see Convention on the Right of the Child, 1989) and defines a child as ‘every human being below the age of 18

¹Throughout this thesis, ‘armed group’ is used to mean non-government militia force (rebels), and in the Ugandan context, the Lord's Resistance Army.

years' does not overlap entirely with Acholi understandings of childhood and adulthood (a discussion on Acholi society is given in Chapter Four). In rural areas of Acholi where the Western cultural notion and rite of passage of being a teenager do not exist, an adolescent girl is considered to be woman upon experiencing menstruation cycles or simply developing breasts. She is also considered to be a woman once she is sexually active or married or given birth (see McKay, 2006:90; 2005c:387; Bunting & Merry, 2006). In Acholi contexts, adolescence is considered to be between the ages of 10 and 17. The *orobo* ('youth') are considered to be people between the age of 15 and 30. The youth are distinct from adolescents in that they are sexually active, a category which also includes females from age 12 and above. In contrast to Western societies where persons are normally thought of as children if they are younger than 18 years of age, in Acholi custom, girls in the age range of 12-16 are considered ready for marriage and bearing children. They become women as soon as they marry or get pregnant, even if this occurs at 12 or 13. A pregnant girl, though young in age, will start self-identifying as a woman rather than a child. In the following chapters, I have retained the terminology of 'former girl abductee'² used by the subjects of my inquiry. I prefer to speak of 'girls' or 'young women' who were formerly abducted rather than of 'children', because not all of these girls/women were seen, or saw themselves as 'children' in the English sense of this term, before, during, or after their abduction.

This study is about the lives and post-war reintegration experiences of former girl abductees in northern Uganda, particularly in the Acholi sub-region. These girls and young women were abducted by the LRA in their fight against the Ugandan government (the war in northern Uganda is discussed in Chapter Two). They later exited the armed group and returned to their families and communities. Based on fieldwork undertaken in Acholi in 2012 and 2013, the thesis attempts to gain a better understanding of who these young women are and how their return to their communities and reintegration has proceeded. It studies their war involvement and shows how and to what extent this experience influenced their reintegration and continues to influence their status and opportunities in their societies.

² 'Former girl abductee', an unofficial terminology commonly employed at the time of fieldwork by reception centers in Northern Uganda to distinguish between returning veterans who had joined the LRA following forced abduction and others who had not been abducted (for example, those who voluntarily joined the LRA).

1.1 The persistence of stigma: reintegration as a lifetime process.

The thesis mainly contributes to the literature of post-war reintegration experiences. According to the United Nations Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS), *reintegration* is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. It is essentially a social and economic process of development with an open time-frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility, and often necessitates long-term external assistance (IDDRS, 2006 1.10, a detailed analysis of this concept is given in Chapter Three).

Since the war began in 1986, Acholi has received research attention and many reports have appeared about the genesis of the conflict, the experiences of those willingly or unwillingly involved in it, and the impacts of humanitarian intervention (see McKay & Mazurana, 2004:54; Veale & Stavrou, 2000:29; Allen & Schomerus, 2006:23–27). So this is not the first study about girls as direct participants of war in Uganda and their reintegration. However, this research is different because it goes beyond the modalities of reintegration or immediate experiences of exiting an armed group and follows the trajectories of these young women as they struggled to rebuild meaningful lives after leaving the LRA camps. Most detailed research studies on northern Uganda focus either on child soldiering or girls associated with the LRA in general, and most were done in the first two years following participants' exit from armed groups. Although they have been included in important surveys (e.g. Survey of War Affected Youth (SWAY)), empirical research to identify long-term gender-specific issues facing them in their villages is still limited. It is important to examine how the return of these young women affected their friends and families at home, how they related to other social actors (such as potential partners or employers), and how these relationships were perceived and negotiated by the girls themselves.

The reintegration practice emphasises the importance of family and community reunification: the family and community generally provides the most effective protection for [formerly abducted] children (Paris Principle, 2007:23). The reintegration philosophy calls for every effort to immediately return and keep formerly abducted children with their families where it is assumed that they will be adequately cared for and protected. Principally, the current understanding of reintegration implies stability and continuity of family and community

contexts. But, as we shall see from the Acholi case study, this is never the case. Girls go back to complex communities, which have been profoundly affected by years of war. Changes in the contemporary social and economic organisation of Acholi society influenced the type of activities that these women can engage in when they get back. Moreover, and in spite of changes in many spheres of life, Acholi is still predominantly a patriarchal culture (Baines&Gauvin, 2014; Porter, 2012; 2013). Residence and inheritance of important assets like land still follow patrilineal criteria. Gender inequalities cut across different social domains. These young women are confronted with the gendered expectations of their familial and extra-familial networks, and they themselves are changed persons who cannot leave behind their LRA experiences.

Research findings demonstrate that reintegration is a lifelong process, which goes beyond immediate family and community acceptance (or rejection, as the case may be, see Chapter, Three). Although after they left the LRA all of the study participants were accepted by their families, they did not perceive this preliminary family acceptance as *‘actual’* reintegration. Being accepted by their families was the starting point for reintegration. To them, reintegration—often described in phrases like *‘my coming back home’*, *‘being home again’* or *‘pleased to be alive’*—was seen as a second chance for life, as personal development and an opportunity to rebuild their shattered lives. But their experiences with the LRA changed them profoundly and changed the way in which they were perceived and treated by their society of origin. In particular, stigma was a major obstacle to long-term reintegration.

To analyse the long-term impacts of war on girl abductees it is necessary to investigate what may be termed the *‘paradox of stigma’*. The study participants were among the many unlawfully and forcibly recruited adolescents and teenagers, a fact that is acknowledged and accepted in both urban and rural contexts of Acholi sub region. This implies that on their return, abducted individuals in northern Uganda should be accepted, protected, and treated with care and compassion by their families and villages. However, formerly abducted persons in Acholi continue to be highly stigmatized and marginalised.

To understand this paradox, one needs to understand the profound value and need attached to maintaining social harmony in Acholi culture (see Porter, 2012; 2013; Ofumbi, 2012:116; Finnstrom, 2008) and the construct of *‘self’* (Chapter Four). Because *‘[social harmony]’* denotes a state of normal relations among the living and the dead, linked to an idea of cosmological

equilibrium and a social balance of power and moral order' (Porter, 2013:15), social harmony is the highest goal of the Acholi community' (Ofumbi, 2012:116). An individual's life should thus be lived in line with achieving this harmony/moral order. However, following a disaster, like an armed conflict, social harmony becomes difficult to achieve and even harder to maintain' (Porter, 2013:15). People who negatively contribute to this harmony like the LRA are seen as, internal strangers' (to borrow Behrend's [1999] phrase). Due to their association with the LRA, formerly abducted persons have transgressed the social harmony and are seen as internal strangers' and wrong doers' who are a threat' to the Acholi culture. Because their actions are believed to cause serious misfortunes in the community (I discuss this theme further in Chapter Four), there is great need to restore and protect the social harmony. Since it cannot be protected and ensured by an efficient formal judicial system with moral authority..., in some cases, the pursuit of social harmony manifests as mob violence, organized revenge, collective killing, or summary execution. In other cases, response focuses on cleansing the parties and/or location involved in the crime, or forgiveness related to Christian theological notions' (Parker, 2012:86).

Cleansing and/or forgiveness does not necessarily rule out the need for retribution: punishment might well be considered to be deserved, but it is typically a secondary goal...' (ibid). Because formerly abducted persons were forced to transgress the social harmony, their case is—in principle—seen as a pardonable level of disruption to social harmony. They are forgiven and/or cleansed and then accepted back in their villages. Although, many of the current research participants have had some welcoming and cleansing rituals performed for them, their stigmatisation demonstrates how the principle of social harmony in Acholi has been compromised and distorted by the effects of war. Although their transgression is seen as a pardonable level of disruption to social harmony, findings suggest a notion of forgiving rather than forgetting *any* level of social harmony transgressions.

Stigmatising and marginalizing formerly abducted people shows that Acholi have not forgotten the wrongs the LRA and their abductees did to them and their society. Although they have been forgiven, formerly abducted people remain a constant reminder of those wrongs'. In return, Achol people target internal strangers' like formerly abducted people to channel their frustration, guilt and confusion. With their personalities considered to be polluted' and no longer seen as normal' Acholi people (Chapter Five), they are stigmatized and marginalized

within their villages. Early in the research process, it became clear that what the study participants had in common was the stigma they receive from their families and villagers as a consequence of their abduction and life in captivity. The Paris Principles (2007) observes that stigmatisation of formerly abducted girls is one of greatest barriers to reintegration(p.32)...stigma facing [them] is fundamentally different in kind—it lasts much longer, is critically more difficult to reduce and is more severe‘ (p.36). The evidence from Acholi overwhelmingly supports this hypothesis.

Although cleansing rituals and forgiveness enormously comforted and reassured formerly abducted people that they were welcome to reintegrate back into their families and villages, they have not protected them from stigma. Even if families have accepted them, because of their transgression, their stigma at community level is long lasting. As I will elaborate later, stigmatization negatively impacts formerly abducted girls‘ attempts to associate with other people in their immediate settings and makes it difficult for them to get into and/or sustain marriages.

1.2 Not just ‘passive victims’: revealing girls’ agency in the reintegration process

This study also contributes to debates on Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR). Whereas all the three elements of DDR are equally important in restoring peace and security, sustainable reconstruction and development, this thesis will primarily focus on the final phase of DDR: reintegration. The Integrated DDR Standards identifies reintegration as the most complex phase of any DDR programme (UN IDDRS, 2006: Section 6.3). In his study of DDR of former combatants in a peace building context, Ozerdem describes reintegration as an open-ended process during which DDR programme merges with the ongoing post-conflict process‘ (2009:21, see also UN, 2010:13).

Since different elements of a DDR programme are intertwined, that is to say they are part of a seamless web in transition from military to civilian life without a clear beginning or end (ibid), it is impossible to analyse reintegration in isolation from disarmament and demobilisation (this is true particularly for the initial stages of reintegration). Although the study was conducted at a time when disarmament and demobilisation in northern Uganda had ended, it looks at how disarmament and demobilisation contributed to reintegration. The study investigates how reintegration is defined by policy makers, researchers, academics, and practitioners among

others. It also identifies their varied expectations of successful reintegration. The thesis then analyses the socio-economic reintegration experiences of formerly abducted girls as well as their perceptions of what successful reintegration might involve.

It is essential that any analysis of the plight of former girl soldiers in Africa is sensitive to local contexts and their experiences should be understood within a particular conflict and context (see Coulter, 2009; Stavrou, 2005; McKay & Mazurana 2004; Verhey, 2004). Acholi sub region was selected as a research setting because of the widespread direct participation of local girls in armed conflict, involving stays of varying length with the armed group. Estimates placed 70 to 80% of the LRA as adolescent and youth combatants (UNICEF, 2006). Most of these were from Acholi area (see Pham, *et al* 2007:14). It has been estimated that adolescent girls made up approximately 30% of the armed group (UNICEF, 2006). Of those who returned, many had given birth to children in captivity (McKay & Mazurana, 2004:9, 88, Annan *et al.*, 2006; 2008). At the time of this research, villages and hamlets in this region were confronted daily with the problem of reintegration of children and their mothers. Thus, the conflict in Northern Uganda can be considered as offering the opportunity for studying the impacts of abduction, child abuse and early parenting on girls. Widespread involuntary recruitment in Acholi has created a 'pool' of formerly abducted girls, potential research subjects with important information on rehabilitation and reintegration processes and experiences to relate.

The thesis shows that although abducted girls in war situations are highly vulnerable, they are *not* passive victims. Young females, particularly those who return with children fathered by the rebels (so-called child mothers), are often described as the most vulnerable upon return home. Following her extensive research on women, girls and armed conflicts, Susan McKay found that, '... girls, ... are among the most vulnerable in post-war contexts' (2004:1). She further emphasized that the situation is worse for child mothers: 'the presence of "war babies" can worsen their [mothers] situations, because these girl mothers and their children are often subject to resentment, due to the children's unknown paternity, or because their fathers are known to be rebels' (ibid). All important policy documents on child soldiering recognise child/girl mothers as a particularly vulnerable group, needing explicit attention within the contexts of their communities (for example, see the 2007 Paris Principles; Machel's 10-year strategic review; UNICEF 2009 and IDDRS 2006). It is argued that some young soldiers should be prioritized for

reintegration because of their experiences, including those who have been severely abused and girls who have become mothers in fighting forces (Jareg, 2005). I agree with this analysis and re-stress that this category of girl soldiers and their children have distinct vulnerabilities and needs. Returning to their communities with children fathered by the rebels/enemies puts such mothers in complex economic, social and cultural situations. However, as findings in Acholi show, this varies with individuals, their families and wider society: for example, when families are supportive, as in most cases in Acholi where maternal families take on the responsibility for children born out of wedlock,³ the mother is able to remarry and start a new life, go back to school/training, or engage in small business activities. Without such family support, the child is an obstacle for the mother's re-marriage and beginning of a new life. While returning with a child fathered by a rebel fighter may make life difficult for the mother, in most cases, girl abductees (with children or not) are highly vulnerable and share common social and economic challenges.

African girls and young women who directly participate in armed conflicts in particular have been too visible as super-victims' (Park 2006:316; Nordstrom 1997:3): too often girls are considered only as silent victims of (sexual) assault—devoid of agency, moral conscience, economic potential or political awareness....'(Nordstrom 1997:36; see also, Denov, 2007; Utas, 2005; Coulter, 2008). While this image of girls and young women as passive victims drives policy making at the global level, donor funding at the country level, and program design on the ground' (Annan *et al* (2009:1), it also contributes to their (and boys') invisibility and marginalization in post war societies:

when child soldiers are constructed as completely lacking in agency during conflict, the need for accountability mechanisms to actively engage with them post conflict correspondingly diminishes and, what is more, perceptions regarding their ability to play a vigorous or independent role in post conflict reconstruction dim, relegating them to the perimeter of the transformative project (Drumble, 2009:9).

Researchers like Utas (2005), Vigh (2006), Honwana (2006), and Denov (2007), among others, have challenged the passive victim image. Their work sheds light on the variegated experiences

³ The Acholi people highly regard their children and grandchildren. It is believed that when a child is not taken care of, the spirit of the dead son/daughter will haunt the family. This applies to grandchildren as well and for the case of children born out of wedlock, the burden falls on the maternal families.

of female child soldiers and shows how they carefully and consciously navigate war situations. Such studies draw attention to their capacity for reflexivity, agency, resistance and resilience. They show that while experiences of forceful recruitment, indoctrination, sexual abuse, and life in captivity point to victimhood, the fact that girls and young women manage to make the best out of their circumstances should be seen as tactical agency (Honwana, 2006:96). These works emphasise the need to see girls and young women's lives in war and post war situations as constantly adjusting in response to the social and economic opportunities and constraints that emerge unexpectedly and ambiguously within war zones:

The agency of these women is not a matter of ~~have~~, nor have not," but rather represents a range of realizable possibilities that are informed by specific social contexts as well as larger economic and political contingencies. A more robust analysis of women's lives in the war zone requires seeing women as something other than mere victims devoid of agency, or alternatively as ~~fully~~ free actors," but rather as tactical agents engaged in the difficult task of social navigation (Utas, 2005:426).

The thesis contributes to the above literature and argues that while abducted girls find themselves in complex and inhumane circumstances; they consciously make choices that ensure their security and survival. Analysing their abduction and life in captivity experiences in Chapter Five, we shall see that right from the day of their involuntary military recruitment, study participants were actively engaged in the LRA world they suddenly found themselves thrown into. They consciously and effectively devised ways to make the best of their adverse situation. Although there was not much room to resist physical and sexual violence in the LRA contexts (see also McKay & Mazurana 2004; Calson & Mazurana, 2008), most girls openly opposed rape and early forced marriages. According to Connell, the agency of abused women is primarily visible in the exercise of any measure of resistance and self-determination used by an abused woman to regain control in her life and in her attempt to stop the abuse she experiences, (1997:118). Perhaps the most decisive moral choice abducted girls in the LRA made was to venture into escaping, despite all the threats of being killed if unsuccessful. Those who compromised and adapted pragmatically to their new circumstances, however harsh, also exercised self-determination as they effectively executed their allocated tasks to ensure a good relationship with their abductors.

Back home, they continue making choices and actively engaging with the world. As I shall demonstrate later, by their own efforts, former girl abductees cope with adversity and exercise some levels of calculated agency as they attempt to make life bearable. One important way they

demonstrate that they are not just passive victims but active agents, is through their attempts to engage in livelihoods (means of securing the necessities of life). However, their options for strategic action are not infinite. Their agency is influenced by their status in society and, in turn, their status and opportunities are shaped by gender ideologies and the sexual division of labour. Because livelihood opportunities for young women are different from opportunities for boys/men, the positionality of formerly abducted young women affects their opportunities in their villages. Moreover, the opportunities of former abductees are not only limited by prevailing patriarchal values, but also—as has been mentioned above—by an added ‘stigma effect’ that marginalises them further not only as women, but also as women whose identities have been spoiled by war.

Crop growing is the main livelihood that formerly abducted girls can engage in. However, because of their gender, their participation in peasant farming is limited. Individual males have claims on patrilineal clan resources like land. Because women access and use land only through husbands and fathers, marriage ‘is life’ for young women in rural Acholi. Marriages remain patrilineal and patrilocal. Women in legitimate marriages are in a more secure position to access their husbands’ clan land. However, because of their stigmatised status, formerly abducted girls are at a disadvantage. They are unable to secure and/maintain formal marriages to ensure their access to, and usage of this important resource.

Stigmatisation also limits their ability to explore their community networking trust, cohesion and inclusion where they would obtain information and other resources, and find social support. As a result, many of them are unable to participate in crop production or/and engage in more highly respected and profitable supplementary livelihood strategies. However, to meet their basic needs, they venture into other less stable sources of income including, hawking, odd jobs, distilling and brewing among others. Because they are aware that ability to earn an income is a valuable way of alleviating their predicament, they are hardworking, shrewd and willing to work in groups or as individuals.

The research found that their reintegration is not a task for their families, communities and NGOs. These young women are aware that although other stakeholders of reintegration are necessary, to achieve a successful reintegration, these girl veterans must primarily help themselves. They must continuously renegotiate their identities and opportunities in multiple

circumstances—at home, but also in many extra-familial institutions. They have significant insights into their circumstances and how to improve them. Most of them see themselves as having a sense of future and a voice that needs to be heard. This is not to imply that this category of young women in Uganda is without challenges to their daily lives, but like other youth in the region, they desire to be recognised for their particular capacities, resilience and vulnerabilities as well.

Generally, their lives do not demonstrate passiveness but experiences of resolve, courage, resilience and agency. As victims, survivors, and occasionally perpetrators of violence, they show strength, independence, and determination to survive (see also Utas, 2005; Coulter, 2009). The findings demonstrate how female youth who returned to ‘bad surroundings’ (to borrow Finnstrom’s [2008] phrase) of Acholi, are re-building their lives, negotiating and making choices in their immediate and community settings to facilitate their reintegration. The findings highlight a need to ask formerly abducted girls to tell their own experiences, ‘rather than assuming the right to speak for them’ (Nordstrom, 1997: 36). They also portray urgency for increasing girls’ agency in war situations and not toning it down: ‘girls must gain a sense of agency and control over their lives, if they and their children are to survive and thrive’ (McKay, 2004:27, see also Paris Principles, 2007:31). The thesis discusses the study participants as active agents who relied on different tactics in their attempts to cope and survive life in captivity. The thesis will demonstrate how they continue to survive by exploiting the opportunities provided by the conditions produced by the post-conflict Acholi. To give them a voice, as a logical focus of the research, I allowed their particular circumstances and experiences to emerge from their stories and inform the study of what was important for their wellbeing. It remains my goal to specifically portray their lived experiences through their own eyes and in their own words.

1.3 Positionality

A research idea seldom comes into view as a surprise to the researcher, but rather as the result of considerations and reflections about the research interest and positionality. In terms of selecting an area of interest for an investigation and how the research was to be conducted, my experience was no different. I came to learn about abductions of children in northern Uganda in 2004. Like many youth in the south of Uganda, I had not paid much attention to the complex emergency in the north. Although the persistent fighting and suffering of people in this region appeared in the

daily media, I remained ignorant of the plight that children, teenagers and youth faced. However this changed in 2004 when I came across a publication detailing the abduction of 139 girls from St. Mary's boarding secondary school in Aboke, Apac District, northern Uganda (see Temmerman, 2001). I had joined Makerere University for a Bachelors course in Economics. This kidnapping that came to be commonly known as 'Aboke abductions' or 'Aboke girls' drew attention of Ugandans in the south (and beyond) to the insurgency and suffering of children in the north. Although 109 of the abducted girls had been rescued by their head teacher, the fate of the remaining 30 raised questions and concerns in the Ugandan public. I began paying attention to this complex emergency and I learned that cases similar to Aboke abductions were wide spread and many girls and boys had been forced to stop school and join the LRA in their fight against the Ugandan army. I understood that many of them were dying in captivity and those who escaped faced a bleak future in their communities. In 2008/9, as I undertook MSc in Disaster Management, I learned more about the child soldiering phenomenon in Africa. I learned that militias particularly target adolescents and teenagers to advance their agendas. This awareness motivated me to seek more knowledge and understanding of the situation of abducted children, particularly the reintegration process and experiences of returning girls.

Before I went to the field, as a researcher, I viewed myself as the one who determined the research agenda and decided how to organize research design, data collection, its refining and interpretation. However, during field work, although I was still the central figure, I recognized the research was a joint product of the participants, myself, and our relationship. This realization further pushed me to reflect and clearly identify my positionality/positionalities in this research process. It is argued that positionality—'your place in space' (Sayed, 2008)—allows a researcher to clearly state the perspectives/lens through which she or he interprets a social world. Maher and Tetreault (2001:22) explain that, 'knowledge is valid when it takes into account the knower's specific position in any context, a position always defined by gender, race, class and other socially significant dimensions'. Apart from these aspects of identity, positionality may also be defined by personal experience including employment, academic background and training, and previous projects worked on, among others. Thus the researcher's perspective, which holds a key role in the research process, is influenced by these aspects of identity and personal experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). It is significant for a qualitative researcher to continuously reflect on his or her positionality throughout the research process. Reflexivity creates an awareness of the

researcher's prejudices, such as ... preconceptions, motivations and ways of seeing [which] shape the qualitative research process' (Cohen & Crabtree, 2008:333; see also Robson, 2002:22). Deutsch (2004:888–889) writes that:

... the researcher's own awareness of her or his own subjective experience in relation to that of her or his participants' is key to acknowledging the limits of objectivity. It recognizes the bi-directional nature of research. I am subject, object, and researcher. My participants are subjects, objects, and actors. To assert otherwise is to be disingenuous about the process of research, especially qualitative research.

Being sensitive to contextual ethical issues, it was important for this author to identify the main identities and backgrounds that influenced the research process. International students returning to their home countries to conduct fieldwork may face a problematic distinction of field' versus home' (see Katz, 1994; Hyndman, 2001, Oriole, 2012). However, this did not apply to this author, because going to do fieldwork in Northern Uganda was by no means returning home'.

I was born and raised in rural Western Uganda (Ankole sub-region) and then moved to and studied in the capital, Kampala (Central Region, Buganda sub-region). In a general sense, when I think about my positionality, it includes aspects of a young woman growing up in rural Uganda, followed by internal migration to the capital city, leading to attendance at six schools (both in rural and urban areas) and pursuing higher education in Kampala and England. I had never been to Northern Uganda prior to the field study. Similarly, most participants had never been to Central or Western Uganda. The field sites were typical villages and semi-urban towns, quite different from the capital city where I dwell when in Uganda. After only a few days in the field, I could tell the social and economic differences between myself and the fellow Ugandan young women I was researching. For example, the class difference was clear. They came from poor peasant families. I was from the capital, from the urban elite who are highly respected by rural people everywhere in Uganda. I was aware that at times such respect (and distinction) is met with some level of resistance and resentment. I also became aware of my education and economic privileges: the fact that I could speak, read and write English, I wore shoes, changed my clothes daily, had plaited hair, had a watch, camera and notebook, and moved by car, among others, all placed the participants and me in different positions.

Before I went to Acholi, as a Ugandan woman, I perceived myself to be an insider'. Insider' research is where social interviews [are] conducted between researchers and participants who

share a similar cultural, linguistic, ethnic, national and religious heritage' (Deianira & Scott, 2006:45). During this kind of research, differences between the researcher and participants 'are brought into focus as a result of shared cultural knowledge' (ibid; see also Setlhabi, 2014; Mullings, 1999:340). During the research design stage, being Ugandan, I believed was something that would help me during field work. However, sharing a nationality with the study participants did not afford me any degree of social proximity with them. Actually, I do not think being Ugandan helped me that much in the interview process because the interviewees were willing to talk to anybody (Ugandan or not) about their experiences. Regardless of historical and political processes locating me with them, the participants can be 'other' or 'different' through ethnicity and class privilege. In this sense I am different from the research participants: a part from our social and economic differences, I have no personal abduction, military or early motherhood background. Significantly, we do not share cultural, linguistic and religious heritage. Having grown up and studied in the Central and Western Regions, I can speak most of the Bantu languages, which are different from the Luo dialects spoken in Acholi and Lango regions (see Artkinson, 1994). Throughout the interview process, I relied on research assistants to help with translation.

Realizing the acute differences between the study participants and me, I felt and acted as an 'outsider' researcher. However, in terms of insider-outsider and the politics of representation, doing research in my home country still brought in a few dynamics. For example, some people saw me as one of their own (Ugandan) conducting important research (getting interested in their life situations), while others placed me in certain categories of urban elite with authority and influence—'othering' me. Being perceived, ethnically, as a Munyankole (person from the Ankole sub-region), I was likely to be associated with president Museveni's regime, possibly with strong links to the government that is dominated by Western Ugandans. Because viewing me completely as part of the 'other' would have encouraged many participants to negotiate our relationship on a continual and/or beneficial basis, I distanced myself from such a position. My attachment to a British university also reduced possible suspicions such as the risk of me being seen by some as a representative of an organization or government ministry collecting personal and other information. In circumstances where the 'insider-outsider' divide was blurred, I found pursuing rapport based on mutual respect more useful. As field work progressed, I learnt to

embrace any possible scenarios that presented me with insider‘, outsider‘ or both positionalities.

Although insider‘ status can make the researcher accepted within the group, evidence shows that it can also affect the research process (see Bousetta, 1997). In my case, viewing myself as more of an outsider‘ researcher afforded me a greater degree of objectivity. Standing as an outsider‘, I remained conscious of the differences and hierarchies in the field. I also understood that I was observed and studied by those who othered‘ me. Having identified the differences between the participants and me, to ensure the research did not do any harm, I considered the possible similarities as well.

1.3.1 Gender, Age and Background

Pratt *et al.* (2007) argue that the differences between the researcher and the participants (cultural, social and economic) can be used productively‘ in the research process. They further note that, indeed, recognizing this productivity is one means of working with—rather than attempting to overcome—difference‘. Jacobs (2000:403) notes that, as well as considering differences, it is also helpful to think past difference‘ and identify positions of betweenness‘ (Nast, 1994:57; see also Harvey, 1996:360). In the current study, apart from my nationality, to bridge the cultural, social and economic gaps, I relied on other commonalities, particularly my gender, age and background.

First, I relied on my gender to develop rapport with the participants. Research has shown that constructions of gender and sexuality influence and shape research encounters (see, for example, Valentine, 2002; Vanderbeck, 2005). It has been suggested that when both researcher and researched are women, the commonalities of experience help them to be able to share their ideas and experience (Finch, 1984; Oakley, 1981). Finch (1984:71) writes that women are almost always enthusiastic about talking to a woman researcher, even if they have some initial anxieties about the purpose of the research or their own performance‘ in the interview situation‘. This reduces the exploitable power balance between researcher and subject (Graham, 1984). From a feminist perspective, Oakley (1981) argues that researchers should seek to equalize the relationship with women they interview as part of their commitment to sisterhood.

Secondly, to increase my chances of developing rapport with the women, I exploited my age factor. Although the majority of the participants were younger than me, the fact that I was in my late twenties at the time of field work and willing to live in some of the remotest parts of the country was a clear benefit to me. Before going into the field, I had anticipated that the youngest participant would be between 22 and 24 years; but I met some women of 19 and 20. However, considering the average age of 26 (range 18–43), I can describe many of them as my age-mates. To avoid any form of tension as the result of age differences while approaching the participants, research assistants in the same age bracket were also recruited. In the long run, I believe being a young female interested in the lives of my fellow young women was a huge advantage to build rapport. With my age minimizing the ‘_authority image’ that may come with older female researchers, the young women found it easier to talk to me about themselves, even enquiring about my social life. This does not mean that I did not get on well with older participants. Age did not limit me when it came to talking to them either; for example, the oldest participant (43) talked to me generously and openly.

Finally, my background of growing up in the rural areas of the Central and Western parts of the country connected me to the participants. Although the Acholi culture and lifestyle are different from that of these regions, having spent my childhood years in villages I could easily relate to the rural lifestyle in the field. Due to the identified social and economic differences, I was aware of the possible resentment and tension between the participants and me. However, I was confident that having spent my first 13 years studying and living in a village, I could bring myself to work with the participants without offending them in any way. Although the participants did not know about this background, observing them—their houses, compounds, gardens, children—I felt a connection stemming from our village life background. Also, the young women I met in Acholi villages were not distinct from the young women (particularly child mothers) I had come across in my village or other areas in Central and Western Uganda: neglected, marginalized and poor; but very hopeful and actively involved in their lives. However, due to their military background and lived experiences, the participants are obviously different from any other young women in the country. I thus depended on this background and experience to forge a relationship with the participants and, from my perspective, such points of identification to some extent bridged our class and educational differences. This connection probably enabled me to be a better and more informed listener. I came to appreciate this background, which made me comfortable and

allowed me to enjoy my time in the field. Before I commenced my fieldwork, I had not anticipated how useful this background would be, but when I reflect back, it actually made much of the fieldwork easier to execute and somehow natural. Although I put in great effort to blend in as much as I could while working with the participants in villages and towns, it would be naive of me to assume that the relationships formed with them or other people I came across in northern Uganda were ever fully equal or that, after six months, I had become one of them.

1. 4 Research Methods

The study required the establishment of direct contact with former girl abductees through fieldwork (Aug 2012–Feb 2013).⁴In the second year of the research, efforts were made to contact a number of reintegration agencies in northern Uganda. Kitgum Concerned Women’s Association (KICWA) took me on as an intern for the six months I was to be in the field.⁵ This is where I was stationed for most of the time while in northern Uganda. In the course of fieldwork, other centres were visited as well, including Gulu Support the Children Organization (GUSCO), World Vision Rehabilitation Centre, Kitgum Women Peace Initiative (KIWEPI) and Christian Counselling Fellowship (CCF). I decided to work with such agencies because I was interested in the local context of the war, how the reception centres addressed the needs of former girl abductees when they first returned home, and how the organisations were still aiding them to achieve a successful reintegration. KICWA welcomed and took interest in my study because they also sought to find out how the former girl soldiers the centre had reunited with their families

⁴ Field work was divided into two stages: preparation and pilot study (4 months) and actual fieldwork (3 months). The first month was spent in Kampala meeting and consulting with researchers at Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR) who had worked on the conflict in northern Uganda. The author was also affiliated with MISR, through which field research clearance in Uganda was acquired. Ethical clearance was first obtained at the University of Birmingham, then from Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST), and finally from Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs) in the respective districts worked in.

⁵ KICWA is a Community Based Organisation that started off in August 1998. As a very small organization, its starting motivation was to help formerly abducted children, particularly those who could not allocate their families upon return. Founded by a few concerned women, in 1999, the KICWA Reception Centre was officially opened as a Rehabilitation Centre for formerly abducted children. KICWA mainly operates in the Acholi districts of Kitgum and Lamwo with plans of extending to Pader and Agago. With UNICEF as their main donor, one of its major activities is to promote the rights and reintegration of war affected children through psychosocial support, advocacy and reconciliation and building their productive capacity for a sustainable development. Like most Community Based Organisations, KICWA (located in Kitgum town) has a privileged position in society. It is trusted by formerly abducted individuals (and other people). Its works are positively received and the organisation is looked at as serving the most vulnerable youth including formerly abducted girls.

had fared over the years. KICWA's acceptance to work with me was an initial important step towards a successful fieldwork phase and the organisation worked as the main *gatekeeper*.⁶

During the first two weeks in Kitgum before the pilot study commenced, I accompanied KICWA field teams to villages in Kitgum and Lamwo districts. By interacting with the staff and people in the villages, I developed a picture and ideas of how to work with the participants and other people in the community. Sleeping in villages for days boosted my build confidence in the field. It also prepared me to fit in with the local people and culture. I relied on this confidence and experience to select the sub-counties to focus on for the interviews. Also, during this time, the research instruments were designed and translated from English to Acholi. Two research assistants were recruited in Kitgum (male, 29 and female, 26) and were employed to help with the entire fieldwork and translation. As university graduates, they were selected on the basis of previous data collection experience. Although they were residents of Kitgum town, they did not know the interviewees personally, even those in Kitgum town itself. They were part of the pilot exercise that provided input for rephrasing, refining and rearranging the interview schedule. A transcriber to help with the data collected in the local language was recruited later on in the process. I managed the whole field process and the collected data.

Data was collected through structured and semi structured individual and group interviews. Interviews were carried out in four districts: Gulu, Kitgum, Lamwo and Pader. Interviews were conducted in towns (Gulu, Kitgum, Pader) and in more remote sub counties of Kitgum district (LabongAmida and Omiya anyima) and Lamwo district (Lokung sub county) (see Appendix B).

1.4.1 In-depth Interviews

The study had 170 participants with whom this author held conversations about questions of war impacts, development, reintegration and the future. Of these, a total of 57 women were engaged

⁶While working with KICWA, it was made clear to the staff and project manager that I was conducting the field study purposely for my academic qualification and not for the government or any organisation. I did not offer or promise to repay their support financially or otherwise, but only to share the final study findings with the management. Throughout the field study, KICWA did not influence the field activities or findings in any way. Throughout the data collection process, KICWA helped me meet some of the field logistics including, transport, office, printing services etc. For interviews in villages, KICWA gave me a vehicle and driver. I provided fuel and the driver's allowances. Considering that the research team spent a whole week conducting interviews in the villages, hiring a vehicle would have been very costly. Transport in other cases, around Kitgum town, I walked or used *boda-bodas* (commercial motorcycles).

in in-depth interviews (Appendix C). The main selection criteria for individual interviews were: a) age at time of abduction-below 18 years, b) length of abduction-longer than 1 year, and c) returning with child/ren. Of the 57 participants, 40 were purposefully selected because they were abducted as children and returned with children fathered by the LRA fighters. The seven of the remaining 17 women were abducted as adults and/or were already mothers. The thesis has drawn heavily on these individual interviews in providing evidence for the arguments, with quotations used as illustrative of the wider set of stories. The table below summarizes some key demographic information for the 57 participants whose lived experiences are discussed in this thesis.

Table 1.1: Demographic Information for the participants

Demographic indicators	Total	Percentage
Gender	57 females	100%
Age at abduction (6–30) years	2–9: 6 10–17: 45 18 and above: 6 Average: 13.6 years	11% 79% 10%
Length of abduction (years) 3 months –12 years	Less than a year: 3 1–5: 19 6–10: 25 11–15: 2 Don't Know: 8 Average: 4.9 years	5% 33% 44% 4% 14%
Returned with Child(ren)? Ranging from 0–5	No: 17 Yes:40 A child on average	30% 70%
Age at time of interviews (18–43) years	18–23: 19 24–29: 24 30 and above: 13 Don't Know: 1 Average: 26.3 years	33% 42% 23% 2%
Length of Reintegration 6 months–12 years	Less than a year: 1 1–5: 6 6–10: 42 11–15: 2 Don't Know: 7 Average: 6.5 years	2% 10% 73% 3% 12%

Before I went out for fieldwork, I planned to meet and recruit formerly abducted girls through local organisations like KICWA. This was not the case, however. I did not rely on KICWA's archives to recruit the participants. I did not want to target only the women who were

demobilised through this centre, given that other agencies had been involved in demobilisation programmes as well, and some former abductees had organised their own demobilisation themselves without agency assistance. Considering that formerly abducted people are known and easily identifiable in their villages, the research team relied on a *snowball* technique to recruit most participants for in-depth interviews. Locating at least three formerly abducted women in a village was enough to start snowball recruitment. Through the snowballing technique, I observed how formerly abducted girls maintained a sort of network among themselves. Many of them knew fellow former abductees including those who had returned with a child or not, had been in abduction for months or years, and those pretending to have been abducted. Only a few of the women asked how the team had known they were former abductees and when told it was through a fellow former abducted girl(s), there were positive reactions.

Identifying and accessing potential interviewees in villages was a much easier process compared to towns. Unlike in the villages, people in towns did not stay in one place for long, they often moved without leaving any useful information. Also, some women in towns kept their abduction experiences private. Unlike in villages, women in towns did not seem to know their fellow formerly abducted persons and there was no sort of ‘network’ among former abductees in towns. Most of the interviewees in Kitgum town were identified through two local women’s leaders. In Gulu town, four participants were identified through a World Vision rehabilitation centre and a further two through their fellow former child abductee. In both locations, negotiation to participate in the study remained between the participant and the research team and not the organisation or local leaders.

Both in towns and villages, it was evident that the women wanted to tell their stories. I observed that they took being interviewed as a great opportunity to be heard, especially in the more remote villages where they would be telling their stories for the first time. For example, during the week taking interviews in Kitgum district, Omiya-anyima sub county, two young women had learned through their fellow former girl abductee about the study. For almost two hours, they walked with their babies on their backs to meet the team in Omiya-anyima trading centre. After explaining the purpose of the study to them, they agreed to participate. Also, while seeking their consent to participate (first day of meeting them), some young mothers insisted on being interviewed, saying they would not find another time in the week. However, it was later learnt

that some of them had thought we would not return to interview them. It cannot be ignored that the women expected to exchange their stories for help (money or supplies); however, they were never deterred when told that participation was voluntary and no compensation was to be expected.

Although most homesteads welcomed us and expressed eagerness to have formerly abducted girls in their families participate in the study, the research team observed a few dilemmas as we recruited the women. One case stood out: On the first day of our visit, we talked to 20 year Josephine in private. Although family (husband, mother and father in-law) were also briefed about the purpose of our visit and the research in general, they remained curious and concerned about what she would share in the interview. When we returned the next day, during the interview, Josephine told us that, "...because you [interview team] came here yesterday, today morning, they [husband and in-laws] quarrelled saying that if you people are thinking of taking me back to school, then I should know that no one will do my garden work..."⁷ We had arranged to engage the husband and in-laws in a family discussion but Josephine requested the family interviews scheduled that afternoon be cancelled. This case precisely portrayed the tension between some young women and their immediate families. Josephine's family seemed happy about their daughter in-law participating in the study, but they were actually not pleased with our visit. They still had questions, particularly on how Josephine was to benefit from the interview. Their reaction did not target the study but Josephine and, as expressed in the interview, this caused her some emotional distress. This case suggested that if we had gone through the husbands or parents to seek permission for the women to participate in the study, it is possible we would have encountered more difficulties or missed out on some potential interviewees. Seeking their consent in private put the women in control of the decision to participate and the information they shared.

1.4.2 Focus Group Discussions and Purposely Selected Persons

The views of other people in Acholi carry influence. A person is not defined as an independent individual but in terms of social relations and the groups she/he functions within (Chapter Four). To supplement information collected from in-depth interviews, I conducted twelve Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with community members and young women (abducted and never

⁷ Interview, CM20

abducted). Data was also collected from eight key informants—people considered to be knowledgeable regarding formerly abducted girls and reintegration including staff at the reception centres, local government officers and village women leaders. These were considered key informants, observers or reflective members of the Acholi who were knowledgeable about the topic and culture. They had worked and/or lived with formerly abducted persons and were in positions to say why some individuals were making progress with their reintegration and others not. Conducting FGDs and interviewing key informants helped in developing an understanding of how people in Acholi make sense of, and attribute meaning to, war and its aftermath and how this is reflected in the attitudes towards formerly abducted girls.

During the research design phase, both family and village members were combined for a group discussion. However, during the pilot study, this did not work. Family members were unwilling to talk about their child, sibling, spouse, etc. in the presence of in-laws, strangers, friends and neighbours. The village members refused to open up about the former female child abductees in their villages. Every participant kept referring to a former child abductee (s) he or she had seen or heard of in communities elsewhere. With experience, I changed the arrangements such that family members were interviewed separately in family groups rather than as part of wider community FGDs. The interview questions did not change for the two group discussions (family and village members), with the focus remaining in each case on the former girl abductees' social and economic reintegration. Inquiring about these issues, the author was interested in understanding how formerly abducted girls were perceived by others, when they first returned to their communities; and after a number of years back home.

The other set of FGD was for the two categories of young mothers: those who were recruited into the LRA and those who were never abducted but had become mothers while still less than 18 years old, for example while living in camps, or following a forced marriage or unwanted pregnancy, etc. Child mothers with no abduction experiences acted as a control group in this research. Although social and economic situations of both groups closely resemble one another, the control group was used to produce comparisons in the findings. Also, the motive for recruiting this category of young mothers was to reduce the stigmatisation/jealousies that could have resulted from recruiting exclusively formerly abducted persons in a village. The participants for these FGDs were mobilised through former girl abductees who had previously

been interviewed. At the end of each in-depth interview, the participant was asked if she could participate in a group discussion for young mothers in a selected village. She was also requested to identify other young mothers who were willing participate. In addition to being interviewed as key informants, village women leaders also helped to mobilise participants for FGDs and to find convenient interview sites. This came with its own challenges. For example, during a pilot study, the two women leaders asked the research team if they could attend the discussion. Naively and out of respect for the older women, I accepted. However, this became a problem as the discussion kicked off and the young mothers were reluctant to talk. At first, the interview team could not understand what the problem was but decided to politely have the two women leaders leave the discussion for a little while. Surprisingly, the young mothers started talking freely, laughing as they responded to the interview questions. This was the first time I observed the tension and differences between women or females in this region in reference to their ages or status etc. In the FGDs with young mothers that followed, no village leader or older women joined the interviews.

Also, using women leaders and former child abductees to mobilise participants for the FGDs in some communities discouraged participation by men. Even when the purpose of the discussions was explained, some men still viewed the study as only addressing women's issues. However, the men who attended the FGDs were a great source of information on the subject. For example, they discussed the topic in a more general manner in terms of problems facing formerly abducted people or returnees behaviour or their networks, and not only issues affecting formerly abducted girls. In addition to the literature on child soldiering and reintegration, such men's views were useful and provided a broader perspective of the collected data. My interaction with the community members was generally good and they welcomed the research because they thought the problems facing this category of youth should be identified and addressed.

1.5 Thesis Structure

This thesis is structured in nine chapters. Chapter Two presents the background and context to the research. It provides a brief analysis of the Ugandan history and post-independence political violence that gave way to the war in northern Uganda that went on for almost two decades. The former female abductees in this study were affected by the war through the Lord's Resistance Army's abductions and returned to a wrecked society following years of fighting and forced

mass displacement. Particular attention is given to the three impacts of this war: participation of underage children, forced displacement and the increasing poverty rates. Providing a background for this research, these impacts are discussed in relation to the main concerns of the study (child soldiering in captivity and reintegration).

Chapters Three and Four look at the theoretical frameworks for this research. This is achieved through reviewing the contemporary literature on conceptual and theoretical perspectives on post war-reintegration. Both Chapters focus on showing how reintegration as a process and experience is understood and perceived, particularly in African contexts (meaning, approaches, initiatives and determinants/measures). Chapter Three starts off with the definitions of important concepts including ‘girl soldier’ and ‘child mother’. DDR’s standards and definitions are explored, particularly as outlined by the United Nations. A brief overview of DDR framework in northern Uganda is also provided in this Chapter. Chapter Three concludes with a definition and an analysis of ‘reintegration’, as a concept and process. Chapter Four examines further the question of Reintegration: Going back to what and where? It discusses the socio-economic context of Acholi society and shows how it has been changed by the effects of war. The chapter concludes with an analysis of two measures/determinants of long-term reintegration, including acceptance and stigma.

Chapter Five and the following three chapters discuss and analyse the empirical research findings. Chapter Five details the findings on the first research objective: what were the war experiences of former female child abductees while in captivity? The women in this study were among the thousands of children and adults abducted in Acholi by the rebel group and the chapter looks at abduction and transformation process from being a mere child, a girl, to a rebel, soldier, wife and mother. Hence, the actual experiences of abduction, journey to Sudan, initiation, military training and deployment are discussed. The chapter then looks at life in captivity, including marriage and motherhood under stressful conditions of an armed group. Finally, the chapter discusses the manner in which they left the armed group. The chapter is composed of experiences depicting personal suffering, resilience, agency and resistance, courage, resolve, and triumph, among other characteristics portrayed by girl soldiers. These personal experiences are important because they offer grounding for understanding their long term impacts on the lives of girls and women as they seek to reintegrate into their communities.

Chapter Six looks at stigmatisation, another central theme in the lives of the study participants. Although there are a number of challenges of social reintegration, the findings show that stigma promotion is a major hindrance to long-term social reintegration. Even though stigma from the women's perspective may be partial or distorted, the chapter argues that their perceptions of it should not be minimised or overlooked. The chapter commences with the definition of stigma, carefully breaking down what is meant by stigma in Acholi contexts. The chapter analyses how the women's social identity is conceptualised and stigmatised. This is followed by a discussion on the types and outlooks of stigma, how their stigma is sympathised with, and finally, how it hinders their reintegration.

In the following two chapters, two measures of socio-economic reintegration are discussed. Marriage (Chapter Seven) is identified as a major determinant of social reintegration. Through a comparative approach, the study analyses the marriage experiences of formerly abducted girls and their non-abducted peers. Chapter Eight, on the other hand, focuses on the theme of ability to earn money as a determinant of economic reintegration. Similar to Chapter Seven, this experience is discussed in comparison to never-abducted youth. Through this chapter, the study demonstrates that abduction and life in captivity reduce young women's livelihood resources, particularly human and social resources. Also, the effects of war further reduce the natural and physical resources that should support them upon return to their communities. With no or limited livelihood strategies in post-conflict situations, they are unable to achieve a sustainable livelihood, which basically defines their successful reintegration.

Lastly, the study is concluded in Chapter Nine. This chapter summarises and retraces the central themes explored and draws conclusions. The author reflects further on her experience of doing research on formerly abducted girls and highlights areas for further research.

CHAPTER TWO: THE WAR IN NORTHERN UGANDA

This chapter situates the study within the context of socio-historical processes that have shaped the current circumstances in Uganda. Providing a socio-historical review supports an understanding of the complex linkages, challenges and trajectories that contributed to the armed conflict in northern Uganda. The historical background and root causes of this war, and how it evolved over the years, have been extensively studied (see Gersony, 1997; Doom & Vlassenroot, 1999; Allen, 2005; Branch, 2007; among others). The purpose of this chapter is not to add to the already explored genesis and historical background of the war, but briefly to show that this civil war was born out of felt grievances rooted in long-term inequalities. Because the war could not be resolved with measures that addressed the roots of discontent, the fighting went on for almost two decades (1986-2005). The chapter then discusses how the war has affected and created problematic circumstances for adolescents and youth through abduction and displacement. Although a number of opposition movements emerged following President Museveni's seizure of power on 26th January 1986, the concern in this thesis is the Lord's Resistance Army insurgency, the most persistent as well as the most destructive rebellion in the region.

The chapter commences with an introduction to this East African country, highlighting important socio-economic characteristics. Keeping the focus on the armed conflict in northern Uganda, the chapter discusses the rise of spirit movements in Acholi and highlights two dimensions/explanations that have dominated the literature on the war: did the Lord's Resistance Army have a rational motive for fighting? And, were they simply a religious/spiritual movement terrorising their own people? The study uses some of the first-hand information provided by the participants in constructing an understanding of the LRA and its strategies. The chapter then looks at three impacts of the war, including abduction of the under-aged; forced displacement; and, finally, the declining economic situation of Northern Uganda, where reintegration of the formerly abducted adolescents is taking place.

2.1 Uganda: Socio-Economic Context

The Republic of Uganda is a land locked Eastern African country which sits astride the Equator. Uganda is bordered to the east by Kenya; to the south by Tanzania; the southwest by Rwanda, the west by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC); and the north by South Sudan (Figure 2.1).

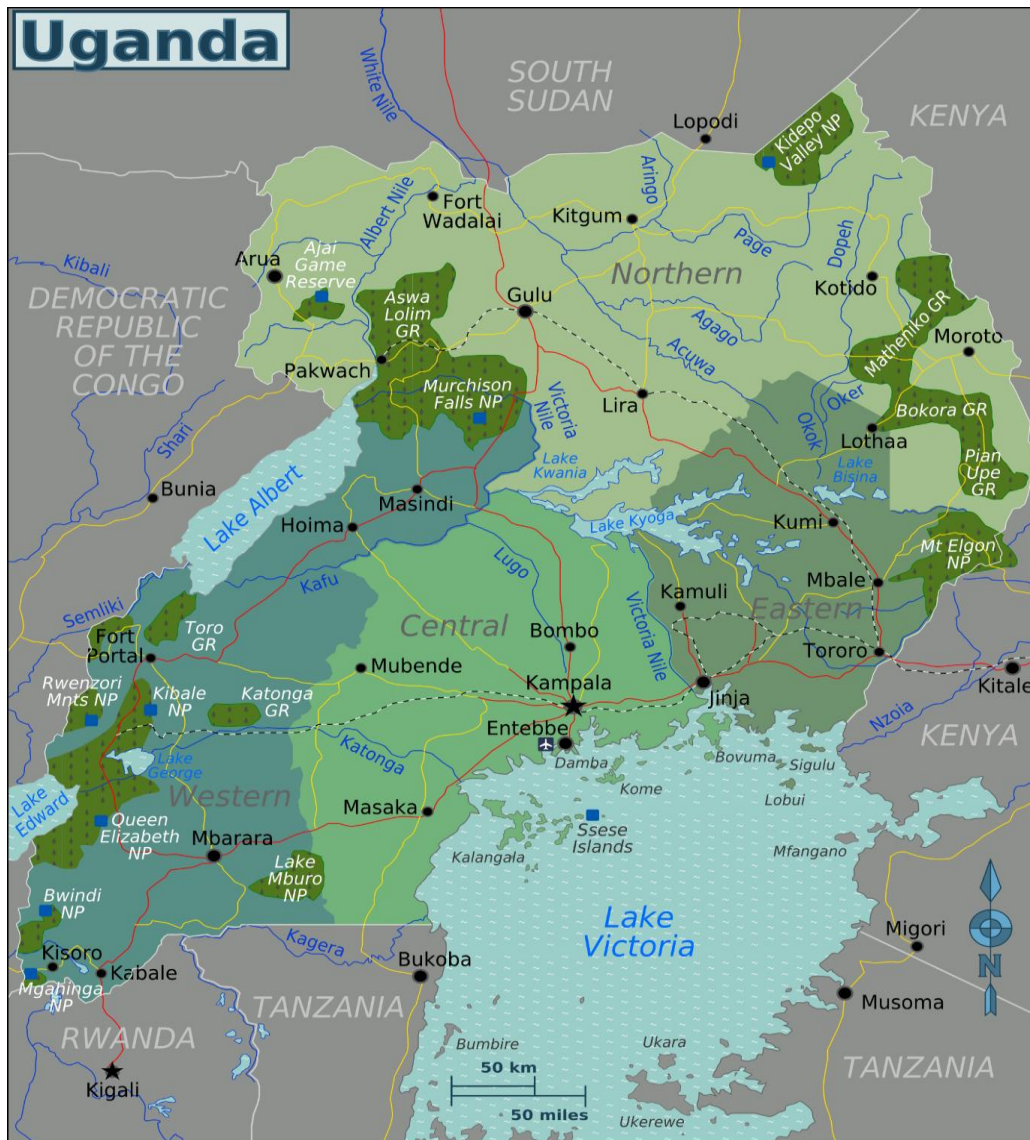


Figure 2.1 Map of Uganda showing its Geography⁸

⁸https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Uganda_Regions_map.png

Located on the East African Plateau, lying mostly between latitudes four degrees north, two degrees South and longitudes twenty nine degrees and thirty five degrees east, the country covers an area of approximately 236,040 square kilometres. Some 36,330 square kilometers are covered by water, with the Nile River traversing the country from south-east to north-west. Out of the four regions (Northern, Eastern, Central and Western), Northern Uganda is the largest administrative region in the country, covering 35% of the total land surface, followed by the Central (25%), Western (23%) and Eastern (16%) regions (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2003). For administrative purposes, the regions are divided into sub regions: northern Uganda (Acholiland, Lango, Karamoja, Teso and West Nile); Eastern (Bugisu, Busoga); Central (Buganda); Western (Ankole, Bunyoro and Kigezi).

With an annual growth rate of 4.7 percent, agriculture remains the most important economic sector in Uganda (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2014). Coffee is the chief export crop and foreign exchange earner. About 80% of the Ugandan work force is employed in agriculture, with most people in rural areas practicing peasant farming. This makes land the most important natural resource in the country.

According to the 2014 National Population and Housing Census, Uganda's population was 35 million in that year, up from 10 million in 1969, with some 11 million of this increased total being recorded during the 2002 – 2014 intercensal period. The national total, which is made up of roughly equal numbers of females (18 million) and males (17 million), is distributed between the country's main regions as follows (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2014): Central (10 million); Eastern (9 million); West (8 million); and North, with the lowest population total (7 million). During the period 2002-2014, the population growth rate was 3.03 percent, a slight decline from the rate of 3.20% observed between 1991 and 2002. If Uganda's population maintains the growth rate of 3.03%, the total population is projected to increase to 47 million in the year 2025 (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2014:16). The high rate of population growth is mainly due to the high fertility levels (over six children per woman) that have been observed for the past four decades, combined with a faster decline in mortality levels, reflected by a decline in infant and childhood mortality rates as revealed by the Uganda Demographic and Health Surveys (UDHS) of 2006 and 2011.

It is estimated that over 78 per cent of Uganda's 35 million people are below the age of 30, with adolescents and young adults (aged 10–24 years) making up about 25 per cent of this cohort (Uganda Population Report, 2013:52). Uganda thus has one of the youngest populations in the world. At the same time, and according to World Bank Data (2015)⁹, the proportion of Ugandan living below the poverty line declined from 57 per cent in 1992/3 to 24 per cent in 2009, and further to 20 per cent in 2012/13. Despite making this enormous reduction in poverty countrywide, poverty remains deep-rooted in many parts of the country, particularly the rural areas, which are home to most Ugandans. The proportion of people unable to meet their basic consumption needs remains high.

Uganda is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world, with more than 40 different indigenous ethnic groups. The major ethnic groups are divided into two broad linguistic groups including, the Bantu-speaking majority, living primarily in the Central, Southern and Western parts of the country; and the non-Bantu speakers, who occupy the Eastern, Northern and North-western part of the country (see Behrend 1999; Gakwandi 1999). Although, there is broad ethnic and cultural diversity in Uganda with many African languages spoken, English (language of the colonial administration) is the official language. It is used in government, courts of law, commerce and as the primary medium of educational instruction. Also English is used by major newspapers and in some radio broadcasts.

Before Uganda gained independence on 9th October 1962, it was under the control and influence of the British. At the Berlin conferences of 1884 and 1885, Africa was diced and distributed to European nations. Following these conferences, Germany and Britain controlled the eastern part of Africa (Harlow & Carter 1999; Gakwandi 1999; Schwab 2001:15). However, in 1890, an Anglo-German agreement was signed declaring Uganda to be solely under British influence and in 1894, Uganda became a British Protectorate¹⁰ (see Ingham, 1958).

⁹<http://data.worldbank.org/country/uganda>

¹⁰ The United States of America, Federal Research Library of Congress (2007:7) describes the term 'protectorate' as 'a political entity (a sovereign state or less developed native polity, such as a chieftainship or feudal princely state) that formally agrees by treaty to enter into an unequal relationship with another, stronger state, called the protector, which engages to protect it (diplomatically or, if needed, militarily) against third parties, in exchange for which the protectorate usually accepts specified obligations, which may vary greatly, depending on the real nature of their relationship.'

At the Berlin conferences, it seemed the primary interest of the Europeans dicing up and demarcating Africa was to secure trade routes via rivers or mountains and other natural resources. The interests and concerns of the natives were not given much thought. ‘These demarcations reflected the balance of power between European and imperialist countries, not the historical processes within the continent’ (Mamdani, 1983:9). People from different backgrounds and traditions (ethnically unconnected), ‘at different levels of social development and without close historical contacts’ (ibid) were brought together to live side by side in a territory. Meredith (2005:1) describes these arrangements as follows:

Using inaccurate maps, large areas were described as terra incognita. When marking out boundaries of new territories, European negotiators frequently resorted to drawing straight lines on the map, taking little or no account of the myriad of traditional monarchies, chiefdoms and other African societies that existed on the ground.... In all, new boundaries cut through some 190-culture groups. In other cases, Europe’s new colonial territories enclosed hundreds of diverse and independent groups, with no common history, culture, language or religion.

In Uganda, for instance, the language and culture gulf between the Bantu-speakers of the south and the Nilotic-speakers of the north was/is wide and this difference has contributed to the country’s subsequent disintegrations. Colonial rule scholars have shown that British colonial governance was about identity formation, reshaping self-consciousness of the colonized and how they thought of themselves. Through this identity formation and reshaping process, populations were broken down into different ethnicities that were further tribalized for administration purposes.

This state of affairs provided a most favourable starting point for the colonial tactics of divide-and-rule which were applied in an all-round manner. To pit one region against another, one nationality against another, one religion against another, and one race against another to ensure the unity of the rulers and the divisions of the ruled—that was the conscious purpose of colonial policy (Mamdani, 1983:9; see also Schwab 2001).

Like other African countries, the colonial period had manifold impacts on Uganda and these historical developments are of particular importance in understanding the armed conflicts that engulfed Uganda during the post-colonial era. The colonial period in Uganda was a time of ethnic and regional division and polarisation (see Karugire, 1980; Mamdani, 1983; Meredith, 2005). Although before the British penetration, the centralised kingdoms in the south had more

developed economies than the segmentary societies (see Ingham, 1958; Mamdani, 1976: 17), the colonial policies exacerbated the existing patterns of uneven development (see Mittelman, 1975:53; Mamdani, 1976: 17). Colonial administration concentrated development efforts in Southern region (Bantu speakers). People in the south, particularly the Baganda (people of Buganda) as sub-imperialists became more powerful than other ethnic groups: economically and became more influential politically. The area benefited most from the spread of education, health services and infrastructural development among others. The British introduced cash-crop farming in the region (see Ingham, 1958:86). However, for other ethnic groups, particularly in the north (Nilotics), colonial rule was a period of economic, social and physical stagnation. During the three decades of colonial government's labour policy (1900-1930s), the north was gradually developed into a labour reservoir for the cash-crop economy of the south, itself a raw material reservoir for the manufacturing economy of metropolitan England' (Mamdani, 1976: 53). The region was further reduced to pastoralism and military recruitment (see Barber, 1968). This led to a socio-economic gap between the ethnic groups and regions: the impoverishment of the north was thus a condition for the relative prosperity of the south. There was no dual economy here—one traditional, the other modern, one static, the other dynamic' (Mamdani, 1976: 52). With the colonial policy dividing the country between two regions—producing and nonproducing—with the north being labour exporting and nonproducing (ibid: 149), the inequality gap (reflected both in income and in the distribution of social services) widened. The divide subsequently set the stage for post-independence violence, counter violence and revenge (Behrend, 1999; Schwab, 2001). From a long-term perspective, divide-and-rule of the colonial government contributed to the genesis of the armed conflict in northern Uganda. The civil war between the government of Uganda and the rebel groups, including the Lord's Resistance Army was born out of felt grievances and power vacuum in the north, particularly in Acholi sub region. It is to this theme of post-independence political violence in Uganda that we must now turn.

2.2 Post-Independence Political Violence

Since independence on 9th October 1962, Uganda has faced political turmoil (see Kasozi, 1994; Gersony, 1997; Branch; 2007). The first government was a coalition of the Uganda People's Congress Party, with Milton Obote as its chairman, and the Buganda Kingdom Party (KabakaYekka, king only' in the Luganda language) chaired by the Kabaka Edward Mutesa (see appendix A: *Uganda Timeline since 1962*). Under the coalition terms, Obote was Prime Minister

and Mutesa a ceremonial Head of State. In 1966, Obote went against the constitutional terms and replaced the Kabaka as president (see Kasozi, 1994). The late Obote was a northerner, from Langoland. Although the army and government contained people from all ethnic backgrounds, the majority were Langi and Acholi, and Ugandans identified Obote's regime with these two ethnic groups. In 1979, Obote was overthrown and replaced by one of his army officers, Idi Amin, also a northerner from West Nile region. His regime (1971–1979) was characterised by torture and killings that mostly targeted the Acholi and Langi (see Mazrui, 1975). In 1980, with the help of the Tanzanian army, Obote and the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) overthrew Amin. An election was held and Obote became Ugandan president for the second time (1980–1985). During his second term (commonly referred to as Obote II), the political situation worsened in Uganda and Ugandans saw the National Resistance Movement/Army (NRM/A) launch a guerrilla war in central Uganda. Museveni and NRA fighters, mainly from Western Uganda and Rwanda, waged war on the Ugandan Army (UNLA) for five years (see Ngoga, 1998). The fighting was restricted to a specific central Ugandan area, Luwero (this war is often referred to as 'Luwero triangle war' (see Luwero district on the map below, Figure 2.2). As the NRA waged war on the UNLA, there was infighting within the army and among government officials (between Acholi and Langi). Following these factional conflicts, one of the Acholi army generals, Tito Okello Lutwa, ousted Obote. There were peace talks between him and Museveni in Nairobi but on 26 January 1986, NRA went against these peace agreements and toppled Okello and the UNLA. With Museveni and NRA taking over power the succession of presidents and governments from northern Uganda (Obote I, Amin, Obote II and Okello) ended. However, this did not end the turmoil but simply shifted position, from central Uganda and the Luwero triangle to northern Uganda, particularly Acholiland, as discussed later.

2.3 Rise of the Holy Spirit Movements

UNLA's loss of power to Museveni and the NRA created three immediate problems in Northern Uganda, particularly in Acholiland: a power vacuum; concern over the returning or rather fleeing UNLA soldiers; and the NRA counter-insurgency (in the 1995 constitution, NRA became the Uganda People's Defence Force (hereafter, UPDF)). After years of fighting and working in central Uganda, many of the former government soldiers returned to their villages in Acholi or went into hiding in Sudan (see Branch, 2007, 2010:25). The former soldiers found it difficult to adjust to the rural life and posed a threat to the Acholi patriarchal order (Behrend, 1998). Following the loss of Acholi-Langi political leadership to UPDF, the Acholi looked to the elders to restore and keep order. The leaders sought to heal and reconcile the former soldiers and the civilians. Like the abducted children and adults exiting armed groups recently, they were expected to go through the Acholi cultural reintegration rituals to be cleansed of the potentially deadly vengeful spirit of the dead, *Cen* (see Chapter 4).

In Acholi, social and cultural problems are still viewed through a spiritual lens; for example, calamities afflicting communities are viewed as a punishment from the spirits for people's wrongs. The former soldiers were seen and treated as 'internal strangers' who had become impure by killing in the Luwero triangle war, hence bringing *Cen* to the communities (see Behrend, 1999:43). To amend this, such people had to be cleansed and accepted back into their communities. However, these former combatants did not pay attention to such community reintegration initiatives. They instead joined rebellions to fight the government and participated in looting operations, creating more tension and violence in Acholiland. According to Behrend (1999:43), the failed reintegration of earlier waves of self-demobilised soldiers threatened the internal security of the Acholi order and needed to be fixed (see also Branch, 2010:25). This internal crisis was worsened by Museveni's army occupying and setting up battalions in some major Acholi towns like Gulu and Kitgum. Without realising the internal crisis within Acholi at the time, the government approached the Acholi people as an enemy who could strike in revenge over loss of national power. Assuming that former soldiers were intentionally refusing to surrender weapons and local people were not collaborating with the new government, the army responded with extreme violence, creating more chaos and grievances (see Branch, 2007, 2010:25).

One of these groups was the Holy Spirit Movement (see Gersony, 1997; Behrend, 1998, 1999; Allen, 2005; Allen & Vlassenroot, 2010:9). The Holy Spirit Movement (henceforth HSM) was led by an Acholi woman from Kitgum, Alice Auma, commonly known by the spirit medium name, 'Lakwena' (meaning messenger). When 'Lakwena' (a Christian, male spirit) recognised the increasing tension and disorder in Acholi, through Auma, he sought to engage in spiritual cleansing to address whatever had gone wrong. Like the Acholi elders, Auma proposed to offer a solution to Acholi's problem by cleansing the former combatants and other people of all impurities. She also offered to drive the government soldiers out of Acholiland through war. Emerging in late 1986, HSM registered unexpected success over government forces before they were defeated in 1988, on their way to Kampala. Auma escaped and lived in an IDP camp in Kenya until she died in 2007.

Following the fall of HSM, in late 1988, Uganda saw the rise of another opposition campaign led by Joseph Kony, an Acholi himself from Gulu district (Allen, 2005:16). Previously, he had led a smaller spirit movement, similar to HSM; but unlike Auma, who incorporated other ethnic groups in her movement, Kony's initial operations were limited to his home area in Gulu (ibid.). It is claimed that he had wanted to merge forces with Auma, but her spirit 'Lakwena' rejected him, causing clashes between their two movements (Behrend, 1999a:29). Kony then worked in the shadow of Auma until she was defeated in 1988 (Gersony 1997:37). The Lord's Resistance Army (hereafter referred to by its initials, LRA) is said to have started with many of the opposition groups whose movements had failed, including the HSM and other UNLA remnants that had refused to surrender to the government. By the 1990s, Kony's movement dominated all the opposition groups in the region. Branch (2007:179–80) describes the period when the group appeared on the scene: 'at a point when the support enjoyed by other rebel organisations among the Acholi peasantry had diminished, a casualty of the rebels' military failures and the government's brutal counter-insurgency.' Although Kony came with a mission of cleansing Acholi of any impurities and, like Auma, he saw war as a form of healing ('Acholi society had to be purified by violence', Allen, 2006:40), his strategy was slightly different from that of Auma. In addition to fighting the government soldiers who had occupied Acholi, he positioned himself to eliminate all Acholis who had been corrupted by the government. Collaborating with the government meant that these people were impure and needed to be uprooted out of Acholi (see Branch, 2010:25). He went on to promote this struggle for almost twenty years.

2.3.1 *The Lord's Resistance Army Insurgency*

Although at the time, there were many anti-Museveni groups (NDDR-RC, 2006; Global Security, 2000, 2011¹¹); the most persistent and destructive was the LRA in Northern Uganda. While the armed conflict between the government and the LRA went on for so long, affecting most parts of northern and north-eastern Uganda and Southern Sudan, the primary victims have been the Acholi and their region (see map, Figure 2.1).

Rational Agenda, Secrecy and More Violence

Even though the armed conflict in northern Uganda went on for two decades, accounts frequently emphasise that the reasons for the LRA rebellion were not entirely clear, beyond the calls for overthrowing president Museveni, re-conquering Uganda and restoring Acholiland to a position of prominence and power (see Gersony 1997; Behrend, 1998, 1999; Amnesty International, 1997; International Crisis Group, 2004:5; 2010). These accounts instead asserted that the crisis in northern Uganda was more humanitarian than political, economic or social. From the early analyses of the conflict, based on LRA's military strategies and tactics, it was emphasised that they did not have a good reason for fighting. Gersony (1997:59) writes that, *...the LRA has no political program or ideology; at least none that the local population has heard or can understand....*⁴ In describing the LRA, the international stories also portrayed the group as having no political agenda for their rebellion: *the rebels have no clear political agenda but have said they want the country governed in accordance with the Christian Ten Commandments*⁴ (BBC, 2003). The media portrayed the movement *as a barbaric and insane cult*⁴ (Allen, 2006: 25). If LRA was accorded any explanation beyond these connotations, this was limited to a proxy war between Uganda and Sudan (see Prunier, 2004), that is, Khartoum was using the LRA as a mercenary army to fight the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA).

Away from the political analyses, the religious and spiritual dimension (see Baines, 2007; Acker, 2004; Behrend, 1999; Eichstaedt, 2009) dominated most of the analyses on the war. There was a persistent impression that the LRA were fighting to overthrow the regime and impose a fundamentalist Christianity in Uganda based on the Ten Commandments (see Gersony, 1997; Doom & Vlassenroot, 1999, 2006; Nambalirwa, 2010; Eichstaedt, 2009, Jeroenet *al.*, 2007). However, in their manifestos, the LRA/M explicitly denied being motivated by fundamentalist

¹¹<http://www.unddr.org/countryprogrammes.php?c=37>

Christian ideology (see Finnström, 2008:124). Even though Kony often proclaimed that the LRA wanted to establish a theocratic state and be ruled according to the biblical Ten Commandments, his army (obviously under his command) acted contrary to this, breaking most of the commandments (Temmerman, 2001:154; Nambalirwa, 2010:183), attacking churches and threatening to kill all priests in the region (HURIPPEC, 2003:6). In addition, for an Islamic Khartoum government to support the LRA for so long in order to fight the SPLA rebellion in the south shows Khartoum must have known the LRA was not pursuing a fundamentalist Christian ideology as perceived by the rest of the world. Without these realisations during the earlier years of the rebellion, the fundamentalist interpretation of the LRA still drove analyses, media and public debates for most of their fighting in Uganda, framing the group as the product of ‘religious fanaticism’ (Acker, 2004:348)—religious lunatics, terrorising their own people.

However, in the latter years of the conflict, a number of accounts emerged challenging this ‘myth of madness’ (see Dolan, 2005, 2009; Bevan, 2007; Branch, 2007; Finnström, 2008; Allen & Vlassenroot, 2010, among others). These accounts began surfacing in particular when the LRA started spreading their fighting to other countries including Democratic Republic of Congo and Central African Republic. These analyses sought to both acknowledge and explain the existence of a coherent LRA political agenda. They provided detailed analysis of LRA political manifestos. For example it is reported that in 1997, the Lord’s Resistance Movement (LRM), LRA’s political wing (reported to be comprised of Acholis in Diaspora) released a number of manifestos. (For an excellent discussion of all the LRA manifestos, see Finnström, 2008: Chapter 3.) Finnström writes that the first, one page manifesto:

...expresses support for human rights, stresses the need to develop national-wide socioeconomic balance, and promotes restoration of national-wide peace and security and ending corruption ... free and fair forthcoming [1996] elections, the establishment of good relations with neighbouring countries, improvements in the judicial systems ... military organisation be separated from the judiciary and executive ... reform of parliament so that it can become capable of tackling critical political and economic issues of the country (Finnström, 2008: 122).

In late 1999, the LRM/A released further, more detailed manifestos and Finnström further cites an 18 page manifesto expanding on the manifesto summarised above and addressing more political and economic issues, such as the UPDF’s military actions in neighbouring countries; challenging the government for multiparty elections; and, while recognising the structural

adjustment programmes, calling for greater emphasis on the most poor, particularly in northern and eastern Uganda (Finnström, 2008:122).

While these new analyses were helpful in offering explanations as to why and how the LRA was fighting, it was still difficult to identify their rational agenda difficult. The misconceptions and myths surrounding the LRA leadership and its use of a mixture of Christian, Islamic, and animist beliefs to validate its actions (Chatlani, 2007:281) masked the leadership's motives for fighting. For example, after all the years of fighting in Uganda, Sudan, Central African Republic and DR Congo, Kony (and all the top leadership) remain a mystery:

... little is known about the rebel leader, Joseph Kony, the man behind the atrocities, and it is clear that this is exactly how he likes it. He has created an aura of fear and mysticism around himself which is an image difficult to dispel (Refugee Law Project, 2004:13).

Throughout the years, he surrounded himself with secrecy, a withdrawn character, and the world was left to guess who Kony and the LRA were and what they were fighting for. The LRA was viewed as if it was an army of one individual, Kony. During the second 1994 peace talks, when the government delegates complained that Kony's absence showed a lack of commitment, his representative informed them that the LRA was more than just Kony: ...you should note that if we (the officers) were not there or the young soldiers were not there, or if the officers who have come were not there, Kony would not be in the bush (cited in Dolan, 2005:121). Although the LRA was obviously bigger than the individual Kony, apart from what returning individuals narrated, little was still known of how the LRA operated—their structures and what motivated their cruelty. Despite all the information on the LRA before they were pushed out of Uganda in 2005/6 and for about 2-3 years thereafter, the realities of the inner workings of the group remain rather mysterious to the external world (see Cakaj, 2010). For a man who had dropped out of school after six years of primary education, trained as an *ajwaka* (traditional healer) (Allen, 2005:16), his strategies for controlling such an army, turning the abducted individuals into his loyalists, and waging a war on the well-equipped UPDF for such a long time remained a mystery. His elusiveness and inability to access the media to promote his political agenda in Acholi and beyond left the important question of why the LRA was fighting not fully answered.

Although some examinations, like that of Doom & Vlassenroot (1999) and Gersony (1997) acknowledge that the LRA's violence sometimes came across as oriented towards realising

certain political and military purposes, the strategies outlined above compromised their rationality further (Finnström, 2008:161–162; Acker, 2004:336). However, according to Blattman and Annan (2008:3), a closer look at the LRA group yielded a more nuanced view; the LRA appeared to be a political and rational organization, however evil and cruel their actions—the group’s political messages had been relatively consistent and coherent, although poorly articulated. According to the former girl abductees’ accounts in this study, however terrible their violence and military operation strategies, the LRA structure appears to have been complex, with a much more strategic outlook than was often assumed.

In relation to whether the LRA was/is a religious group, the accounts given by the study participants do not suggest that the LRA is a religiously fanatic group. But, as discussed in Chapter Five their leaders observed some of the Acholi traditions that are applied in close relation to Christianity (see p’Bitek, 1971). Basically, religion, spirituality and traditional beliefs served as a code of conduct in the daily life of the abductees and LRA members, but not as the foundation of their fighting. The leadership simply relied on these to ensure discipline, adherence, and respect to military order: the man who believes [in God] is a good fighter’ (former LRA commander, quoted in Cakaj, 2010:5). Thus, religion and spiritual order served to ensure internal cohesion, through motivating, legitimizing and intimidating the individual fighters’ (Titeca 2010:62). Apart from relying on military organisation and roles to run the LRA, in order to maintain cohesion in the organisation, Kony exploited his spirits’ multi-layered visions, including ideas of maintaining control, liberation and destruction to advance the rebellion (see RLP, 2004:13). Also, the use of a religious language was a tool for maintaining loyalty, motivation and confidence among the followers (Branch, 2007:174). Religion, infused with Kony’s personal spirituality, became a viable strategy to run a disciplined army and justify its actions. Kony used the language and framework of religion; spirituality, traditional beliefs and ruthlessness to reinforce his terrifying and mysterious personality (see Gersony, 1997:36; Eichstaedt, 2009:16; Behrend, 1999:179).

To conclude this subsection, considering that Kony was not highly educated and practised healing for most of his adult life until he came to warfare, it is possible he did not start with a clear understanding of political processes or a framework to channel his dissatisfaction with Ugandan politics. It is also likely he did not know much about the importance of positive

publicity to an effective rebellion. Among other factors, these could have limited the LRA's ability to get their message and agenda across to the country and the world. However, 'failure of the LRM/A to have access to the mass media to express its political agenda in intellectual form does not mean the lack of it' (Finnström, 2008:127). Further, considering the general political, economic, social and cultural situation of northern Uganda at the time, this could have motivated anyone to start a war against the government. Thus, '...we need to pay attention to the power relations and structural circumstances that promote such persons' positions' (ibid.) rather than seeking to understand whether the fighting individuals have a rational agenda or not. In relation to the analysis of the conflict in northern Uganda, the over emphasis on the religious and spiritual aspects of LRA marginalised other crucial and valid political, economic, social and cultural concerns (Finnström, 2008:115). Considering that these dimensions were/are interconnected, it was/is important to 'interrogate the social totality of the conflict, paying respectful attention not only to economic factors but to social and religious dimensions as well' (Dunaa, 2010:56). The LRA's usage of a religious language to frame their vicious violence and military strategies should be seen as one aspect coexisting with other dimensions (Branch 2007:174). The current study argues that whether the armed group had a political motive or not should not become the pivotal point for reintegrating the formerly abducted adolescents and youth that were caught up in this war or responding to the post conflict situations of northern Uganda.

The LRA's Adolescent Abduction Practices

The LRA rebellion is well-known for their widespread child abduction practices in Uganda and beyond.¹² Kony initially stated that his group was carrying out abductions to protect children from an evil society so that they could be secure and live in the alternative world that he intended to create with his fighting (Behrend, 1999:179–182). However, in the long run this strategy impacted the group's image negatively. They were portrayed as an irresponsible rebellion that lacked accountability for their actions. Such strategies further alienated them and made LRA

¹² For present purposes, child abduction is defined as 'the unlawful removal, seizure, capture, apprehension, taking or enforced disappearance of a child either temporarily or permanently for the purpose of any form of exploitation of the child—this includes but is not limited to recruitment in armed forces or groups, participation in hostilities, sexual exploitation or abuse, forced labour, hostage-taking, or indoctrination. If a child is recruited by force by an armed force or group, this is considered as two separate violations—being abduction and recruitment' (Watch List, 2011 (May):16).

appear a less than viable partner in peace negotiations (Schomerus, 2007:16). They were viewed as a rebellion that was utterly unaware of their international, national and traditional responsibility to protect the underage (Allen, 2006:114). When observers, commentators and peace activists concluded that the LRA had no viable agenda for their fighting, they turned their attention to the recruitment of ‘poor’ Ugandan children. This also shifted the focus from the bigger picture of the war effects, like how the fighting and displacement were impacting the people and children in the general population (Dolan, 2002).

A figure produced by UNICEF in 2006, estimating that the LRA was 80 per cent comprised of abducted children, some as young as eight, circulated in the literature, portraying LRA as ‘an army of children’. However, the current findings support the existing evidence that age mattered during the abduction process. Commonly, abductions in northern Uganda were more focused on adolescents rather than children under the age of ten or adults. Children under the age of ten were frequently released before the abductors headed for South Sudan (see also Blattman & Annan, 2010:132; Schomerus, 2007:16). Although women in this study were abducted at different stages of their lives, the majority (79%) were in the age range of 10–17 years, with a further 11% less than 10 years of age and another 10% adults (18 and above). They were abducted in the period 1998–2003 when the armed conflict was most brutal in the region (see Branch, 2007; Allen, 2005). This data suggests that during abduction, the LRA ‘recruiters’ took the females’ age at abduction into consideration. They purposely targeted pre-adolescent and adolescent girls aged 10 to 16 while avoiding the *anyira-matino* (Acholi for ‘little girls’) below the age of 10 and adult females (over 18s). This evidence supports the observation that, as with boys, adolescent girls are often targeted by armed groups in Africa (see West, 2000:193; Veale, 2003).

But why target the adolescents? Evidence from other armed conflicts in Africa shows that pre-adolescents and adolescents are easier to control, indoctrinate and manipulate than young adults. Less likely to question the authority, they easily adapt to the harsh conditions of the jungle and become loyalists (see Honwana, 2006; Singer, 2005). In Uganda, the abducted adolescents were taken to remote areas of the north and Sudan, where they were trained and brainwashed, and when they returned to Uganda for the first time, many of them did not think of escaping (or they were terrified of the same). Defecting usually happened after serving for a while. When they were older, if an opportunity to escape presented itself, many opted for it. In addition, pre-

adolescent and adolescent girls were targeted because they had not yet been sexually active, and therefore did not suffer from any sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including the potentially fatal Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). Due to HIV/AIDs and displacements, the LRA was also aware of a demographic shift in northern Uganda (Blattman& Annan, 2012:146) and exploited it knowledgeably. With adults dead or weakened, they targeted the adolescents. Lastly, as discussed in Chapter 5, the LRA also targeted girls for their functional value in the camps, for fighting, domestic work and farming.

In northern Uganda, studies and international media depicted the abduction of children as happening at night, hence the ‘night commuters’—children leaving villages for towns every evening in fear of being abducted at night, and then returning to their homes at dawn (see Lunde, 2006; Radhakrishna, 2006; BBC pictures¹³). However, the findings in this study support the evidence of other scholars like Dolan (2009:79; Veale &Stavrou, 2003; Blattman& Jeannie, 2008) that abductions were large scale and random, so much so that abduction appeared to have been a chance event. Abduction took place at any location, day and time, and not necessarily or only at night. Recruitment took place when the adolescents were involved in their daily activities, in their homes, bush (collecting firewood or house building materials), water wells, gardens and village pathways. Even those in boarding schools were not safe (see Temmerman, 2001). This made it difficult for the families and communities to protect the children from being recruited into the LRA. In Acholi sub-region, it is almost impossible to find a family that was not affected by these abductions, which were concentrated in Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader, although neighbouring sub regions like Lango, Teso, West Nile, and South Sudan were also affected (see Annan *et al.*, 2006, 2008; Dolan, 2002; Allen, 2005).

Significant inconsistency exists among estimates of the number of children abducted in northern Uganda (McKay &Mazurana, 2004:77): ‘the scale of abduction is a matter of speculation’ due to insufficient monitoring (Allen, 2005: iii). A survey carried out by UNICEF Uganda covering the period of 1999–2001 shows that of 28,902 people who were abducted from Gulu, Kitgum, Pader, Apac and Lira, about 10,000 were children (UNICEF, 2001; see also Dolan, 2005:91). Abduction seemed to increase soon after the failure of peace talks in 1994 and LRA’s recourse to Khartoum for support and to provide a base for their fighting. Since the support was given for the

¹³http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/picture_gallery/05/africa_night_commuters/html/2.stm

purpose of fighting the SPLA, the LRA needed to equip its troops to fight the two armies (UPDF and SPLA) and other militias. Like the atrocities towards the civilians, the increased abductions were also connected to the government's attempt to involve the Acholi civilians in the 'Home Brigades' to fight the LRA (see Branch, 2007). Abductions thus increased during the government counter insurgencies, with more than 10,000 children said to have been abducted in the period 2002–2004 (Annan *et al.*, 2006, 2008; Pham *et al.*, 2007; Blattman & Annan, 2008; Berntsen, 2010: note 3; Dolan, 2005:91). There are no accurate records of abductions after 2004. However, the Berkeley-Tulane Initiative (2007) and Brubacher (2010:272) highlight that the abductions decreased in the period after 2005, with just over 200 reported for the first six months of 2006. By June 2007, many reception centres were not receiving returning individuals.

In an attempt to sum up the abductions, Pham *et al.* (2007:14) estimate that between 1986 and 2006 approximately 54,000 to 75,000 people, including 25,000 to 38,000 children, were abducted, with the majority 89 per cent of them from Acholi region. These estimates were based on the number of children passing through reception centres. However, abductions seem to have been underreported (Annan *et al.*, 2008:31). The estimate by Pham *et al.* does not account for the possibly many children and youths who did not pass through these centres. Annan *et al.* carried out a survey in northern Uganda (Survey of War-Affected Youth—SWAY) that was based on a random survey sample of 1,016 households that included youths abducted from ages 14–30. This estimates that at least 66,000 youths between the ages of 14 and 30 seem to have been abducted (Annan *et al.*, 2008:31). Although this estimate leaves out the children below 14 who were among those purposely targeted by the LRA abductors, the survey captures the abducted adolescents and young adults who self-demobilised, died or are still missing—something the other estimates do not do. The survey estimates that 20 per cent of male and 5 per cent female abductees were dead and never to return (*ibid.*: 33). These are the major studies that offer abduction estimations in northern Uganda. However, they both leave out the many children born in captivity to the abducted girls (for more about this category of children in northern Uganda, see Eunice Apio's work).

Although there are no definite figures for abductions by the LRA in northern Uganda, it is apparent that most abductees were from Acholi region. It is difficult to determine which estimates are right, but these high figures depict how severe abduction practices were in northern

Uganda. The figures also show that many of the young adults today have been affected by the abductions and, as discussed in Chapter 8, there is a need to explore how the abduction experience continues to impact daily lives and livelihoods.

2.5 Forced Displacement

This section looks at forced displacement as one of the policies the government employed in its attempts to end the war. It is important to look at the mass displacement in northern Uganda to identify how it impacts ‘reintegration’ as a process and experience. In 1996, the government came up with a strategy to protect the populace from LRA attacks and abductions by forcibly displacing them from their villages into government created camps (see Branch, 2007). By 2005, there were more than 200 internally displaced people’s camps—commonly referred to as ‘protected villages/camps’ (HRW, 2003:4; Human Rights Focus-HURIFO, 2002:11). The government purposely drove people—particularly in Acholi—out of their homes into the camps, in most cases in the trading centres or near UPDF battalions. This was done through intimidation, bombing and burning down of homes (Acholi Religious Leaders’ Peace Initiative (ARLPI), 2001:8–10; HURIFO, 2002:10; Atkinson, 2009:8). The villagers were given a short notice of seven days to ‘peacefully’ move to the camps. Thereafter, followed artillery and mortar shelling of the villages, followed by foot soldiers marching villagers to the camps. Anyone found outside the camps would be considered a rebel and possibly killed (HURIFO, 2002:8; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2006:35).

This government strategy was said to have been for security purposes and allegedly to cut the rebels’ food supply and decrease forced recruitment of children and youth (Behrend, 1998:117; Carlson & Mazurana, 2008:12). The then Senior Presidential Adviser, Major Kakooza Mutale, was quoted as saying: ‘the depopulation of the villages removes the soft targets and logistics for the survival of the rebels. They would lack food, information, and youth to abduct and people to kill. Desperation would drive them to attack the Army in the camps. That will be their end’ (cited in HURIFO, 2002:16). The President also had a similar response, indicating that the measure would leave the villages ‘open for UPDF confrontation with marauding remnants of the rebels now terrorizing innocent people’ (ibid). As a military strategy, forced displacement seemed to make sense, since clearing out the villages would give UPDF an opportunity to fight the rebels when they lacked resources (food and recruits).

However, as time went on, a mass displacement strategy affected the people more than saving them from the wrath of the LRA. From 1996 to 2000, about 400,000 civilians, mostly in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader, were living in camps. These people in the ‘protected villages’ were later to become internally displaced persons (IDPs).¹⁴ Although they were still in their country and in Acholiland, displacement left them vulnerable, exposed and their livelihoods disrupted, undermined and destroyed. Considering that many people left northern Uganda for Kampala, other districts or abroad, it is possible that most of the people in Acholi at the time were the poor and those living in rural settings. Since a majority (77%) of households in northern Uganda depend on subsistence agriculture (Ministry of Finance, 2003:9; see also Girling, 1960; Atkinson, 1994), confined in the camps, people could not cultivate their land, rear domestic animals or engage in any agro-business, as had been the case before the war. They instead depended on foodstuffs distributed by relief agencies (Dolan, 2005).

Apart from displacement breaking down livelihoods and lifestyles, the camps further rendered the people vulnerable to rebel attacks and abductions (Branch, 2007:181). The LRA did not have to roam vast areas of northern Uganda to abduct and loot; they simply attacked the camps to accomplish their mission (Finnström, 2008:131–165; HURIFO, 2002:10; HURIPPEC, 2003:81). Although they were in ‘protected villages’, people were left with little or no protection from the LRA (Atkinson, 2009:8). It is reported that once the camps were formed, the UPDF began withdrawing soldiers from the north, leaving people to be protected by the ‘home-guard’ brigades and a few soldiers (Refugee Law Project, 2004:29–30).¹⁵ This made it easier for the LRA to terrorise the civilians (International Crisis Group, 2007:1; Branch, 2007). People were affected from two sides, the government and the rebels. The government forced them into ‘protected villages’ while the LRA threatened and abducted them, and burned their huts in order to push them back to the villages (Acker, 2004:350; Finnström, 2008:131–165). Living in the

¹⁴UNOCHA (1998: section 2) defines Internally Displaced Persons as the ‘persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised State border’.

¹⁵ The government-backed home guards (formerly known as the ‘Arrow Brigade’) were groups of civilian youth who were armed with bows and arrows to fight the LRA. This was one of the government’s earlier initiatives to fight the rebels, through encouraging the local population to join forces and fight off the LRA.

camps was considered collaborating with the government army and administrators and called for punishment.

Following intense attacks in 2002–2004 that extended to other sub-regions of northern Uganda like Lango and Teso, many more people were displaced. Although people in Lango and Teso were not forced to move into the camps as was the case in Acholi, they still fled their villages to the camps for their own safety. By mid-2005, approximately 1.8 million northern Ugandans were internally displaced (Relief Web, 2005; Dolan, 2005:9). While there were displacements in other sub-regions, 90 per cent of the IDPs were found in Acholi (Berntsen, 2010: note 3; Dolan, 2005:9; Allen, 2006:72).

Apart from lacking protection from the LRA, camp situations made their suffering more severe. Characterised by the worrying conditions, forced displacement came to be understood as ‘forced dependency, forced vulnerability, forced humiliation, forced congestion within camps, and forced isolation from outside’ (Atkinson, 2009:8). Because of the large numbers of people confined in camps, life there was marred by conditions of poor sanitation, violence, starvation, disease and poverty, among others (GUSCO, 2010:5; HURIFO, 2002). A study carried out in 2005 by the World Health Organization and the Ugandan Ministry of Health estimated that conditions in the camps in Acholi were resulting in 1,000+ excess deaths a week. Causes of death included malnutrition, malaria/fever, respiratory and diarrhoeal diseases, murder, and suicide. Furthermore, because of lack of basic supplies (food and water, shelter and housing), trauma and emotional distress were higher in the camps. There were also high rates of sexual violence against women and girls, especially rape. Females were raped by the fighters including government soldiers who were meant to be protecting them (MSF-Holland, 2004 (October and November); Hunter, 2007; WHO, 2005). A report by Morten and Hatloy (2005), who interviewed 2,300 households in 67 camps, found that: one-third of all children above 10 years old had lost a parent and 9 per cent of children in the camps were orphans; illiteracy was very high, particularly among women (84%); most people had very few possessions; 85 per cent of all households received food aid; youth idleness and unemployment were widespread; and crime rates were extremely high. These were the life conditions that the women under study and other formerly abducted individuals returned to when they exited the LRA. Most of them were reunited with their families in these camps to start on their reintegration.

2.6 Post-conflict Northern Uganda

It has been ten years (2005–2015) since the LRA left Uganda and, following the 2006 peace process,¹⁶ there has since been optimism among northern Ugandans. Since 2006, there have been no LRA attacks, and with this relative peace, people began returning to their villages or resettling in new environments near their villages and areas of cultivation (satellite camps). There, they started a challenging recovery process. By the end of 2007, the overall number of IDPs living in camps had reduced from a high of 1.8 million to 1.3 million (OCHA, 2008). At the end of 2008, 420,000 people remained in IDP camps and by 2010, more than 90 per cent of the 1.8 million people had left the IDP camps, with 112,000 people including 28,000 children still in camps (IRIN, 2008; OCHA, 2008; UNHCR 2010:1). On 6th January 2012, the *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees* (UNHCR) announced that the UN's main and the world's biggest refugee agency had concluded all its relief work with IDPs in the region. Also, the many other relief agencies that flooded the region when the conflict was at its peak (2000–2004) have now left the region, and the remaining NGOs are supporting economic activities for formerly displaced people rather than providing emergency relief. By the time of the field work in 2013, all people had returned to their villages. The study came across only one satellite camp, in Lokung, Lamwo district, Deblyoch village, bordering South Sudan. Some people were still in the satellite camp because of land wrangles back in their villages and others had nowhere else to go. Once described as ‘the world's worst forgotten humanitarian crisis’ (Dolan, 2009:23), northern Uganda is now a different region altogether.

A collective effort to shift the region completely from humanitarian assistance to more regular development assistance through national institutions is in progress (IRIN, 2013). The government and the development partners are rebuilding the region through initiatives like the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP, see Chapter Three). PRDP has indicated that most welfare indices in the north are poor, largely because of the conflict and the consequential weak state institutions (Government of Uganda, 2007). It was implemented

¹⁶ Following the collapse of the Betty Bigombe peace talks in 1994/5 (see Branch, 2007; Dolan, 2005), new peace talks were initiated. On July 14, 2006, the world saw the government of Uganda and LRA come to the negotiating table. These peace talks became known as the ‘Juba peace talks’ that resulted in several agreements: Cessation of hostilities; Comprehensive solutions to the conflict; Accountability and reconciliation; permanent Ceasefire agreement; Demobilisation, disarmament and Reintegration. Most of these agreements were signed, creating hope for peace in northern Uganda at last. However, Joseph Kony failed to sign the final peace agreement, hence further increasing the unpredictability of attaining sustainable peace. For more on the Juba peace talks process, see Schomerus (2007); International Crisis Group, 2007; Atkinson, 2009, 2010:205).

and fully commenced in the Fiscal Year 2009/10 and it is currently in its second phase. PRDP and other initiatives like Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF 1&2)—supported by the World Bank—aim to revitalise the economy, targeting the most vulnerable households and persons in the region. The improved security in the region enables business and investments to run as expected, but the region remains extremely poor.

The war in northern Uganda not only left the region paralysed, with people subjected to horrifying suffering (widespread killings, abductions, displacement, torture, and sexual abuse, among other afflictions), it also affected the region's economic development by destroying the infrastructure, markets, livelihoods and through increased migration. Compared to other regions in Uganda, poverty trends analysis shows that northern Uganda has the highest rates of poverty at 64 per cent in rural and 40 per cent in urban areas (Republic of Uganda, 2008).¹⁷ Due to the prolonged war, poverty levels increased rapidly in northern Uganda. In 2003, the Ugandan Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development in the Office of the Prime Minister published a report indicating that income poverty declined rapidly nationally between 1992 and 2000, from 56% to 35%. However, poverty levels had not fallen at the same pace regionally, but rather remained high in northern Uganda. The proportion of people in the region unable to meet their basic consumption needs declined marginally from 72% in 1992/93 to 66% in 1999/2000, although urban dwellers experienced a much faster poverty decline from 55% to 31% within the same period. However, between 1997 and 2000, poverty rose again from 60 to 66% implying 2 out of 3 persons in the region were poor. According to the Poverty Status Report, 2003, 'one third of the chronically poor (30.1%) and a disproportionate percentage moving into poverty are from northern Uganda' (Ugandan Ministry of Finance, 2003:102). This represents 7% of the total population of Uganda (34.5 million) (New Vision, 2011, 2013). This showed that almost a half (44.3%) of the poorest 20 per cent of the Ugandan population lived in northern Uganda (Ugandan Ministry of Finance, 2003: 9).

¹⁷The 1990 World Development Report defines poverty as the 'inability to attain a minimal standard of living', measured in terms of basic consumption needs or income required to satisfy them. The World Bank uses \$1.25 a day as the measure to assess poverty levels. The poverty line is based on the expenditure necessary to buy a minimum standard of basic necessities.

Poverty remains highest in Acholi region. For instance, for 2005/2006; poverty rates for Gulu stood at 67%, Kitgum 78% and Pader 76% (Ahikire *et al.*, 2012). These figures seem consistent during and after the war, whereby northern Uganda did not register much increase in household welfare, but rather the poverty head count index went down tremendously in the period 1992-1999 compared to the national poverty head count index, which declined in the same period (Ugandan Bureau of Statistics, 2003). At the same time, a 2006 study conducted by the Civil Society for Peace in Northern Uganda found that 70% of northern Ugandans had no monetary income and 90% lived in ‘absolute poverty’ (Justice and Reconciliation Project, 2007:16).

According to the 2007 progress report on Uganda’s Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), there was an obvious economic imbalance between the north and the rest of the country with the north maintaining the highest incidence of poverty at 61% (UN 2007:12). In the Uganda Bureau of Statistics’ 2009/2010 report, 46.2% of the inhabitants in northern Uganda lived below the poverty line. This is almost double the figure for the country as a whole. The Poverty Status Report 2012 showed that some 40 per cent of people in Acholi were *absolutely poor* compared to 4 percent in Kampala (IRIN, 2013). Compared to the rest of the country, the region also fares badly in other measurements of well-being. For example, the infant mortality rate is about 20% higher than the nationwide average. The poor human development outcomes are mainly attributed to the armed conflict and loss of assets like cattle (MFPED, 2005).

2.7 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, we have encountered some of the impacts of the conflict in northern Uganda including abduction, mass displacement and widespread poverty. As will be discussed in the following chapters, these issues define the socio-economic situation formerly abducted individuals find themselves in today, struggling to reintegrate, provide for themselves and their families. Following the destruction of livelihood strategies for households, there are no real economic structures for formerly abducted and other vulnerable youth to rely on. The fluid economic situation presents a negative impact on the reintegration process, experience and life in general. This is exacerbated by the unwelcome treatment formerly abducted individuals receive from their families and communities. As will be shown in the following chapters, all these issues are related to the concept of long term reintegration.

CHAPTER THREE

'GIRL SOLDIERS' AND POST-CONFLICT REINTEGRATION

3.1 Girl Soldiers and Child Mothers

There is controversy surrounding the terminology used to describe female adolescents that participate in armed conflicts. They are often identified as girl soldiers or girls associated with fighting forces. One concern is that identifying girls as soldiers conceals both the involuntary basis of their participation and the non-combat roles they fulfil. On the other hand is the concern that identifying the girls as only associated with fighting forces denies them agency in their roles, actions and experiences (Tonheim, 2010:13). Similar to the label girls associated with fighting forces, the description of forcibly involved girls was introduced in Angola (see Wessells, 2007b:7; Stavrou, 2005). Angolan girls preferred the forcibly involved girls description to girl soldiers, as the former underlined that their participation was not voluntary. Girls associated with the LRA are commonly referred to as formerly abducted girls, female returnees or former girl soldiers. Like their Angolan counterparts, the participants felt that identifying them as former soldiers was prejudicial, stigmatising and suggested that they willingly offered their services to the LRA. Although they protest the former abductee, formerly abducted or the woman who was in the bush identities that the community and NGOs have baptised them with, they feel that with time, they will get over their consequences and replace these identities with their preferred classification of young woman, mother or wife.

The literature on girl soldiers, particularly when they have been sexually violated, employs various concepts such as, forced wives and bush wives (see Coulter, 2006, 2008; Carlson & Mazurana, 2008; McKay, 2004; Annan *et al.*, August 2009). For girls who give birth during their time with fighting forces, the commonly used terms are girl mothers (McKay & Mazurana, 2004:53; Paris Principles, 2007) and forced mothers (Annan *et al.*, August 2009; Tonheim, 2010). It is important to note that neither of these terms can be used as a universally accurate description due to the contextual variations relating to their experiences including duration, roles within the armed groups and abuse. The term girl mother as used in the Paris Principles does not make any reference to the girl's association with armed groups, and forced mother indicates that all pregnancies within the armed groups are involuntary and unwished for (Tonheim, 2010:15). However different, these descriptions are all related to forced marriage and early

pregnancy practices in armed groups. Forced marriage is, since the Special Court in Sierra Leone's ruling on the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and Revolutionary United Front (RUF), a legally defined international crime and, hence, a meaningful term (see Park, 2006). Girl mother, forced mother, child mother, when used to describe the situation concerning girls within the fighting forces, are all related to forced marriage or forced wife. The word mother, however, obviously implies the birth of a child to a mother while in an armed group, which again also falls under forced marriage.

Although most of the former female abductees in northern Uganda who gave birth are currently older than 18 years, reintegration agencies and community based organisations (CBOs) still refer to this category of young women as child mothers. The persistence of the child mother description can be partly attributed to the way abduction was interpreted by reintegrating agencies and the Acholi people in general. It was viewed that abduction denied an individual a smooth childhood development. He or she was perceived as a child, in reference to their age at abduction, until the individual returned home. This means that upon abduction, a child's age was frozen and even when she or he returned home aged over 18 or as a mother, that individual was still considered and treated as a child. This was basically done for legal purposes and reasons of the individual's responsibility and accountability. This, however, makes the usage of child mother confusing because, generally, the description is used to refer to any female who gives birth to their first child before the age of 18. While the early motherhood aspect of former girl abductees' abduction experiences cannot and should not be overlooked, presenting them as girls who gave birth in the bush (child mothers), even when they are adults, limits the understanding of the multiplicity of their war experiences.

However confusing its usage is, the present research adopts the term child mother to refer to any former female child abductee that exited the LRA with a child. When the label of child mothers is used, it also describes young women who became mothers when they were still children themselves (below 18), for example in the camps or by rape in the village. The younger mother/woman description refers to the female youth between 15 and 30 years of age who are mothers, including former abductees and their non-abducted counterparts that participated in the study.

3.2 Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR)

When an armed conflict comes to an end in a country or region, economic and social conditions are usually not supportive for all former soldiers returning to their communities, and they may find it challenging to settle on their own. Assistance and programmes that address their struggles and difficulties as well as broader post conflict recovery are essential. For this reason, the United Nations' DDR programme is considered as one of the important phases in rebuilding war affected societies (Veal & Stavrou, 2003:19). The most influential international standards guiding the DDR processes and frameworks are the 2006 UN Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS) and the Stockholm Initiative (2006). According to IDDRS (2006 1.10), *Disarmament* is the collection, documentation, control and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives and light and heavy weapons of combatants and often also of the civilian population. Combatants are stripped of their weapons through a trade-in system, which offers them money or participation in vocational training in exchange for their weapons. Disarmament also includes the development of responsible arms management programmes. *Demobilisation* on the other hand is the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces or other armed groups. The first stage of demobilisation may extend from the processing of individual combatants in temporary centres to the massing of troops in camps designated for this purpose (cantonment sites, encampments, assembly areas or barracks). The second stage of demobilisation which is called *reinsertion* (commonly, too, *transitional safety net*), encompasses the provision of a support package to the demobilised. This is assistance offered to ex-combatants during demobilisation but prior to the longer-term process of reintegration. Reinsertion is a form of transitional assistance to help cover the basic needs of ex-combatants and their families and can include transitional safety allowances, food, clothes, shelter, medical services, short-term education, training, employment and tools, and can last up to a year (reintegration' is defined and explained later in this chapter).

The success or failure of these processes and programmes directly affects the long term stability and peace building prospects (Knight & Ozerdem, 2004:1; Fusato, 2003). Ensuring effective DDR is therefore key to sustaining long-term peace and security, as well as paving the way for individual and community development. Many post conflict African countries have acquired expertise in DDR exercises both within and outside a UN framework. There are two kinds of DDR: *formal* programmes, implemented by the UN (Development Programme-UNDP;

Department of Peace Keeping Operations-UNDPKO), the World Bank, international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as well as member nations of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development-OECD (McKay & Mazurana, 2004:98; IDDRS, 2006). There is also *informal* DDR, carried out by the state and humanitarian organisations, but still executed in the framework of formal DDR. This is the kind that took place in northern Uganda after 2000 where the state, national NGOs and donor agencies seeking to address the conflicts handled the DDR process. As discussed in the following sub sections, the figure below presents an overview of links among the policy, technical/planning and operation/implementation levels of DDR in northern Uganda.

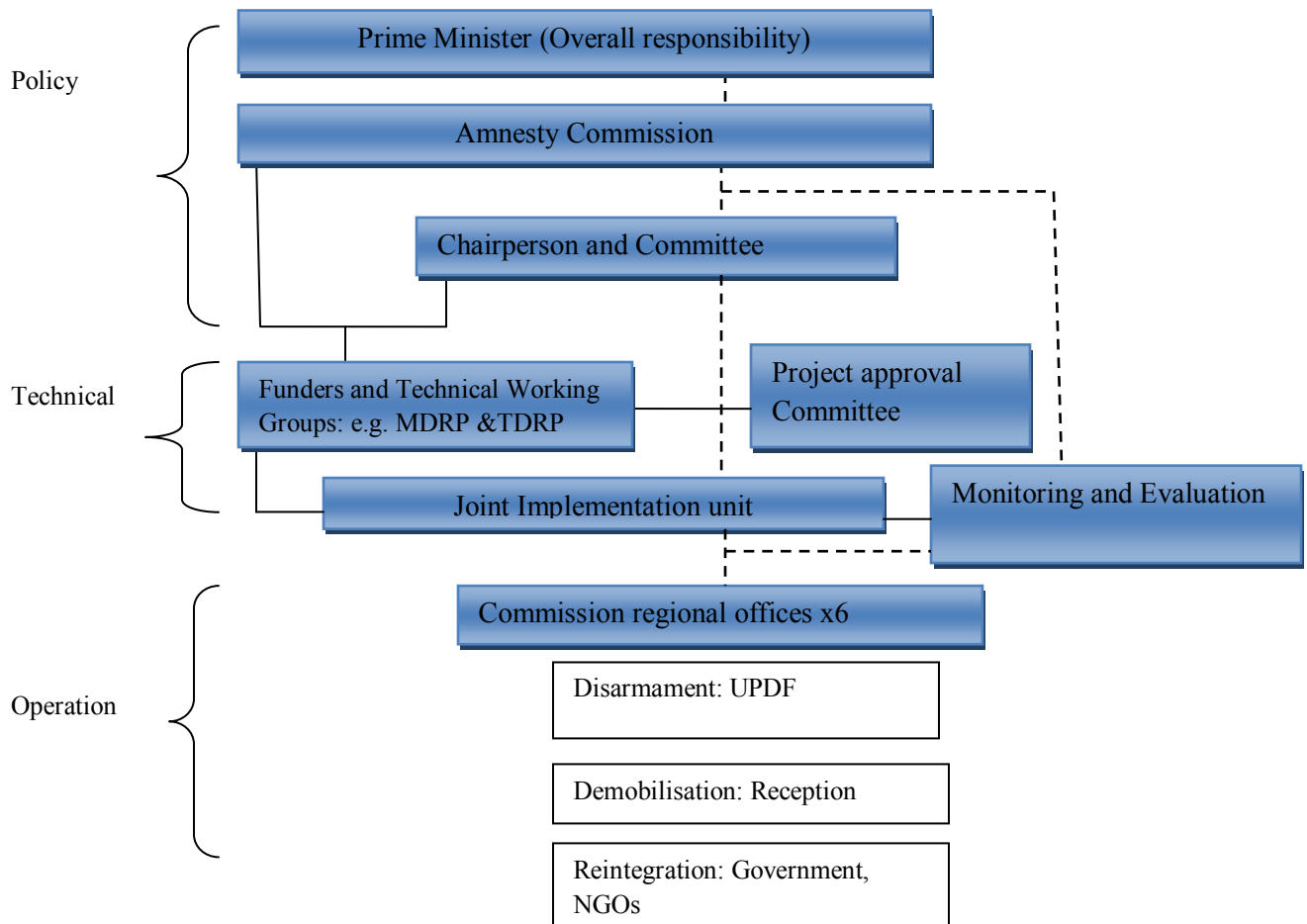


Fig 3. 3 Organisation chart for DDR intervention in Uganda

Source: author

3.3 The Nature of Government of Uganda Intervention in DDR

DDR in northern Uganda was implemented under the Amnesty Act. In 2000, the government of Uganda passed the Amnesty Act ‘...in respect to any Ugandan who has at any time since the day of the 26th of January 1986 engaged in or is engaging in any war or rebellion against the republic of Uganda’ (Amnesty Act 2000, paragraph 2 (3)).¹⁸ The Act, which was set to expire in mid-2008, granted amnesty, broadly understood as pardoning, forgiving, and exempting from prosecution by the state, with no distinctions on the levels of responsibility or ranks of the applicants, be they commanders, foot-soldiers, camp helpers or any of the abducted persons (Amnesty Act, section 3(2)). However, on 24 May 2006 the Act was further revised by a legislative statute intended to ‘deny amnesty to leaders of rebellion and to provide for the grant of amnesty to persons abducted, those coerced into rebellion and those who apply for amnesty in reasonable time, in good faith and who have demonstrated repentance’ (see Allen, 2007).

To implement the Amnesty, in 2000, the Act of Parliament established a Commission.¹⁹ According to the Amnesty Act 2000, section 8, the Amnesty Commission is a government organisation comprised of: ‘Chairperson who shall be a judge of the High Court or a person qualified to be a judge of the High Court; and six other members who shall be persons of high moral integrity’ (Amnesty Act 2000, para. 9). The commission’s statutory functions are to:

- a) monitor programmes of demobilization; reintegration; and resettlement of reporters²⁰
- b) co-ordinate a programme of sensitization of the general public on the amnesty law;
- c) consider and promote appropriate reconciliation mechanisms in the affected areas;
- d) promote dialogue and reconciliation within the spirit of this Act; (e) to perform any other function that is associated or connected with the execution of the functions stipulated in this Act (Amnesty Act 2000, para. 9).

¹⁸ A copy is available at www.c-r.org/our-work/accord/northern-uganda/documents/2000_Jan_The_Amnesty_Act.doc

¹⁹ The Commission has its headquarters in Kampala with about five regional offices (three in the north: Arua, Kitgum and Gulu district).

²⁰ In recognition of the fact that most of those seeking amnesty could have been involuntarily recruited by armed groups (as was the case with the LRA), the Act refers to amnesty beneficiaries as ‘reporters’, as opposed to ‘ex-combatants’.

Within the commission, a Demobilisation and Resettlement Team (DRT) was also established (to be appointed by the president, with the approval of the parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Defence and Internal Security (Amnesty Act 2000, para. 11)). DRT is responsible for: decommissioning of arms; demobilization; resettlement; and reintegration of reporters (Amnesty Act 2000, para. 13).

To finance the implementation of its mandate, the Amnesty Commission relies on different sources. International organisations and donor states have supported the amnesty process in Uganda over the years, including the European Union, USAID, Britain, Ireland, DANIDA and the Netherlands among others (see Mallinder, 2008). They have provided funds and expertise to the amnesty commission by setting up DDR schemes. For example, the commission got direct financial and technical assistance from Multi-country Demobilisation and Reintegration Programme (MDRP)²¹ and the Transitional Demobilization and Reintegration Program (TDRP)²². To cover its administrative costs, the commission has also received limited funds through the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

On 23rd May 2012, on grounds that war in northern Uganda had ended, amnesty provisions (part II of the Act) were withdrawn by the Government (Mugisa, 2012; IRIN News, 2012). This effect dissolved the Amnesty Commission's work in relation to receiving and reintegrating returning ex-rebels and formerly abductees. In the following subsections, the chapter analyses the impact of the amnesty DDR particularly in relation to formerly abducted individuals in northern Uganda.

²¹ Multi-country Demobilisation and Reintegration Programme (MDRP) was initiated by World Bank, UNDP, member nations of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and others to support countries' DDR activities and transition to broader recovery and development programs. MDRP was the largest programme of its kind to be implemented in the world and was designed to support an estimated 400 000 ex-soldiers in seven countries of the Great Lakes Region (GLR) of Central Africa, including Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda. MDRP worked with national partners to finance and implement demobilisation and reintegration activities. Created in 2002, MDRP closed in 2009 See MDRP on <http://tdrp.net/mdrp/index.php>

²²The Transitional Demobilization and Reintegration Program (TDRP) followed in the footsteps of the MDRP. TDRP is a six-year program (2009-2015) financed by a multi-donor trust fund including African Development Bank, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, and Sweden among others. The TDRP continues to provide technical assistance to the Amnesty Commission to finalize evaluations and assessment of DDR activities in Uganda. See TDRP on <http://www.tdrp.net/> and Finn *et al.* (2012) for a Uganda Demobilization and Reintegration Project Beneficiary Assessment report

Disarmament

Disarmament of returning children and youth was handled by the Ugandan army (Uganda People's Defence Force, UPDF). Upon exiting the LRA, under military procedures, the LRA child abductees were to be referred to a nearby barracks of the UPDF's Child Protection Unit (CPU) for up to 48 hours (Allen & Schomerus, 2006). In practice, children were frequently held for longer periods: for example, some of our participants were kept for periods ranging from two days to three months. During this time, they were housed, fed, clothed and their statements were taken; thereafter, they were transferred to interim care centres for further rehabilitation assistance (see also McKay & Mazurana, 2004:79). Since some of the returning abductees had been militarily trained, carried guns and fought on the front lines, UPDF used this period to debrief them on their military experience, and those who exited with guns were advised on how to surrender them. Regardless of the time spent at the CPU and age differences, abductees were treated well, with fairness and dignity, by the Ugandan forces (see also Anann *et al.*, 2008:36; McKay & Mazurana, 2004:81). However, there were also reports indicating that while in the barracks, some girls (and boys) were threatened and assaulted by UPDF soldiers (see HRW, March 2003, July 2003).

While residing at the CPU, many returning individuals registered with the amnesty commission. The commission's primary task in relation to the war in northern Uganda was to register ex-rebels and former abductees, issue them with amnesty certificates, resettle and then help them to reintegrate into society. Children above the age of 12 and adults who spent more than four months in the LRA were eligible to apply for the amnesty certificate. Under the terms of the Amnesty Act, they were to report to the nearest Army or Police Unit, a Chief, a member of the Executive Committee of a local government Unit, a magistrate or a religious leader within the locality and renounce and abandon involvement of the war or armed rebellion (Amnesty Act, 2000, para. 4(1)(a)). Each applicant was issued with a certificate of amnesty, exonerated of all crimes. The Commission's database indicates that, as of the 22nd August 2008, 22,520 former rebels had been granted amnesty since 2000 (Bean, 2008). By 2009, a total of 55% of amnesty beneficiaries were LRA returnees (Mallinder, 2009:31). Considering that LRA's recruitments were higher in comparison to other armed groups in the period 2000-2005/6 (see Bean, 2008), this figure is low. The Survey of War Affected Youth in northern Uganda found that two-thirds of [LRA] formerly-abducted youth [did] not appl[y] for formal amnesty (Annan, *et al.*, 2008:44).

In our research sample, 39% of the women did not register with amnesty commission. According to Annan and others, *low application rates may indicate that receipt of a Certificate [was] not seen as worthwhile, [was] too difficult, or [was] to be avoided due to stigmatization...that the amnesty process [was] poorly understood* (Annan, *et al*, 2007:5). In their study in northern Uganda, Allen and Schomerus found that, *there [was] much confusion amongst FAPs [formerly abducted persons] about what amnesty actually mean[t]: for some it mean[t] receiving a [resettlement] package, others believe[d] that they ha[d] been granted amnesty if they ha[d] gone through a reconciliation ceremony* (2006:38). While it remains unclear why individuals exiting the LRA did not apply for amnesty, it seems that efforts to communicate the amnesty to the potential beneficiaries targeted those who were still in the LRA camps (see International Crisis Group, 2007a: 7; Pham, 2005: 49; Allen, 2006:75) and not those already back in towns and villages. Allen and Schomerus further found that, *others ha[d] lost faith in the amnesty, because they had been consistently turned away from the Amnesty Commission's offices. The probability of receiving an amnesty package of assistance items [was] regarded as so low, that many just [did] not bother claiming it—not realizing that not applying for amnesty could have legal consequences* (2006:38). Among the reasons given for applying amnesty, *being granted amnesty from the Amnesty Commission to obtain legal immunity from prosecution was barely ever mentioned as an explanation about what amnesty means* (ibid).

Demobilisation

In implementing its mandate, the amnesty commission worked in partnership with interim care centres (commonly known as reception centres in Northern Uganda). The Demobilization and Resettlement Team (DRT) over saw the activities of most centres. It set out policies and guidelines for their operations. DRT

[did] not directly [manage] reception centers, except where there [were] no specialized agencies capable of assuming the task. In this case, the Demobilization and Resettlement Team [took] direct responsibility for reception, generally by using the facilities and resources of existing institutions within the district and the community (Community Development Office, community counseling facilities, civil society groups, the UPDF, religious, traditional and cultural leaders (DDR Resource Center, as quoted in Mallinder, 2009:29)

Reception centres ensured the defecting individuals were rehabilitated and reunited with their families. Possessing an amnesty certificate and return or family reunification through these

centres was considered as *formal reintegration* in northern Uganda. According to interviews and the literature, most of the returning children and young adults found their way to their families and villages with the help of these centres. It is therefore important to explore the contribution of these centres to the actual reintegration of returnees. Reception centres act as briefing points, re-introducing returning individuals to ‘normal’ society by preparing them for possible reintegration challenges and opportunities (see McKay & Mazurana, 2004; Mazurana & Carlson, 2004). Formerly abducted people were thus provided with space and opportunity for healing and reflecting, and interacting with other returnees and staff—something that boosted their confidence in their new environment. In practice, rehabilitation via the centres involved three major components: physical, health and psychological (see HRW, March and July 2003; Allen & Schomerus, 2006; McKay & Mazurana, 2004:83; Mazurana & Carlson 2004).

Upon arrival at the centres, individuals went through an assessment of their general condition and urgent physical needs, including accommodation, feeding, and clothing, that helped them reorient themselves to a new, ‘normal’ environment. They also had access to health care, as McKay & Mazurana’s (2004:83) research among returning girl soldiers found: ‘the centres [had] nurses who provide routine nursing and health care for the children and youth and make contacts with hospitals for testing and additional medical care. The centres also employ[ed] counsellors and social workers who work[ed] with the children using a variety of approaches’. Project managers for KICWA and World Vision rehabilitation centre indicated during the present study that all persons at the centre were taken to a local medical centre and those with special health needs like broken limbs were referred to Lacor hospital, Gulu town (the biggest referral hospital in Acholi region). Indeed, a whole year after their eventual departure for home, returnees that went through KICWA still benefited from access to medical service at the centre. In addition to health provision, individuals were assessed for psychological illness. If symptoms of depression, trauma or post-traumatic stress disorder were found, they received treatment for illness while they were still at the centre.

As their physical and mental conditions improved, individuals were provided with other support like counselling. KICWA and World Vision provided counselling on individual or group basis, with those with emotional and social problems for example, benefiting from psychological support (see also Akello *et al.* 2006; Mazurana & Carlson, 2004). Group counselling happened

when former abductees gathered to talk with social workers about their challenges, progress and worries among other issues. It is important to note that professional counselling is almost non-existent in Acholiland. As the following quote exemplifies, available counselling dealt commonly with how to live with others in societal settings, how to react to stigma and how not to lose hope in the possibility of a more promising future:

The social workers counselled/trained us on how to live if we got back to our villages... They counselled us to leave the 'bush mentality' of wanting to hurt or fight any one that disturbs us. They told us to live the life people back home were practising. If someone stigmatised or started a quarrel with us, we were not to respond physically but report them to the LC [local council leader].²³

Counseling was complemented by healing ideas, through Christian prayers, cleansing ceremonies, recreational activities like singing, dancing, acting, painting and watching movies that were also helpful for bonding and networking (see also McKay & Mazuruna, 2004:83).

According to individual needs, length of time (in months) spent at the centres varied with 3.4 months as the average. For example at KICWA, under normal circumstances, an individual was expected to stay at the centre for at least two months. However, many of the participants who went through this centre stayed for longer than that, including those who were pregnant or had returned with children, or had been in abduction for a long time and whose families could not be traced easily. Although the women in this study were not asked to evaluate (or comment) on whether the services and support they received were adequate or not, it is clear that some interventions made a positive contribution towards reintegration. Many women described their lives and experiences at the centres as 'good' and 'helpful' (see also McKay & Mazuruna, 2004:83; Mazuruna & Carlson 2004). Research indicates that there is a difference between returnees who go through rehabilitation centres and those who do not: for example, a study of 567 children (412 male and 155 females) in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts found that formerly abducted children who did not pass through the centres had more trouble reintegrating. They were less confident, more anxious, depressed and angry compared to those who went through the centres (MacMullin & Loughry, 2002).

²³Interview, CM5, 13/12/2012

Reinsertion

In January 2005, the amnesty commission received \$4.2 million from MDRP to formally launch its DDR programme on 13 May 2005 (Mallinder, 2009). The money (to cover a period of two years) was intended to assist approximately 15,300 reporters [from different armed groups] in their reintegration into civilian life, within the context of Uganda's Amnesty Act of 2000; and Strengthen the capacity of the Amnesty Commission' (Finnegan & Flew, 2008:7). Since then, Amnesty Certificate holders in northern Uganda have received an unconditional cash payment (as part of reinsertion/resettlement package) from the Amnesty Commission (Allen & Schomerus, 2006:37). Each of reinsertion package included both cash—sh350, 000 (\$205)—and physical items such as a mattress, blanket, cup, pots and pans, jerry can, ten kilograms of seeds, farming tools' (International Crisis Group, 2005:8). In our research sample, 61% of the women reported to have received this unconditional cash payment ranging from 10,000 to 300,000 Ugandan shillings (US\$ 4-120), with the majority (53%) receiving between 210,000 and 300,000 (\$84-120). They received the assistance while they were still rehabilitating at the reception centres. This should not however imply that everyone who applied for amnesty received the reinsertion package. Although the commission received international financial support, its work was often hampered by financial constraints, for example, by end of 2005, the backlog of reporters who had not received reinsertion assistance...had climbed to nearly 11,200' (Cecily, 2008:135, see also Allen & Schomerus, 2006:38; Annan *et al* 2008:44).

In addition to the above assistance, and as part of transitional support, the centres also facilitated vocational skills training programmes for returnees. Like the skill programme designers and providers, returnees believed this training would provide expended livelihood options during long term reintegration. The women considered participating in skills training as the most important factor for successful long term economic reintegration (see also Mazurana & Carlson, 2004). In our research sample, 44 % of women received training in hair dressing, tailoring, baking, catering and farming skills among others. Although most women received such training during their stay at the centres, others accessed training after they had already returned to their villages or moved to IDP camps. Upon successful completion of the course, they were expected to rely on their newly-acquired skills to earn a living. The concern in this thesis is the impact of reinsertion support including the newly-acquired skills. Chapter Eight of this thesis seeks to

analyse particularly the impact of tailoring, one such skill and a livelihood activity, on long term reintegration.

Reintegration Assistance through PRDP

The MDRP programme in Uganda closed on 30 June 2007. The completion of the MDRP seemed to have left the commission completely unable to issue unconditional cash. However, in September 2007, the Ugandan government launched a three year plan (2007-2010): *Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda*, PRDP (see Government of Uganda, 2007). The government formulated this comprehensive development framework...as a strategy to eradicate poverty and improve the welfare of the populace in Northern Uganda (Government of Uganda, 2007: iii). The overall goal of the plan/framework was to consolidate peace and security and lay foundation for recovery and development (ibid: iv). This was to be achieved through four core strategic objectives including: consolidation of state authority, rebuilding and empowering communities, revitalization of the economy and peace building and reconciliation. The PRDP's stakeholders included the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) (constitutionally mandated to oversee the implementations of the plan), Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (to manage and budget the plan's financial contributions), sixty four northern Uganda districts and municipalities (to plan and administer the plan's implementations). NGOs and Development Partners were also to play a role in planning as well as implementation of activities (see Government of Uganda, 2007).

Objective four (peace building and reconciliation) had reinforcing demobilisation and socio-economic reintegration as one of its sub-objectives: the objective of this programme is to coordinate and facilitate of socio-economic reintegration of reporters in a timely manner (Government of Uganda, 2007: 101). Budgeted over 18,099,500,000 Ugandan Shillings (US\$10,055,278, (ibid: 102)), objective four stated that with

the strategy for demobilization and re-integration will focus on provision of resettlement packages to the ex-combatants, facilitating reunification with their families and the community and providing opportunities to access existing service providers. Mass information dissemination and facilitation of contact with reporters will be promoted.

Other strategies include:

- Issuance of a Demobilisation Certificate and kits (of about \$250 USD in value);

- Provision of bursaries for formal education for an estimated 20% of the reporters;
- Skills training/apprenticeships for 50% of the ex-combatants. In some cases, the assistance may be a one off while in other cases, it may be for a specified period depending on the specific needs of individual ex-combatants. For example, a onetime support will be given for income generating activities, education may be for an average 2-4 years and skills building may be for 3-6 months; and
- Provision of support to income generating activities for 30% of the ex-combatants.

Activities will include:

- Clearing backlogs;
- Defining the assistance framework;
- Establishment of technical standards for programme interventions;
- Establishment of delivery mechanisms and identification of service providers through issuance of a request for proposals from existing organizations;
- Establishment of a system to facilitate the linkage between reporters and reintegration assistance; Plan for handling the potential new caseload (Government of Uganda, 2007: 101).

To fund PRDP, the government requested for support from the World Bank. A special Multi-Donor Trust Fund was established in January 2008. Countries including Britain, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden among others committed funds to the Trust (Mallinder, 2009:30). On 19 August 2008 the funds to socially and economically reintegrate former rebel combatants into communities to which they return, within the context of the Government of Uganda Amnesty Act of 2000⁴ (World Bank, 2008, para, 6) were allocated to the Amnesty Commission, to help both new and back-logged case-load of reporters⁴ (ibid).

When PRDP1 came to a close in 2010, PRDP2 (July 2012-June 2015) was launched in November 2011 (see Government of Uganda, 2011). PRDP2 pledged that it [would] maintain a .strong programming focus on ex-combatants to ensure effective community level reintegration and resettlement⁴ (Government of Uganda, 2011:33). But, the proportion of funding allocated to this area ha[d] been, and [would] be, lower than other strategic objectives, because many of the activities [were] not as resource heavy. This [did] not mean that this [was] not a priority area: the overall success of the PRDP and PRDP 2 [was] dependent on the peace building and reconciliation activities⁴ (ibid).

On paper at least, Uganda has had a relatively strong and compressive set of development initiatives which contained specific components on DDR but, despite the focus placed on

reintegration under the PRDP to date, there appears to be a lack of substantive information about the success of reintegration activities, and their impact on ex-combatants and the communities they have returned to', PRDP2 acknowledged (Government of Uganda, 2011:32). PRDP2 went on to note that

...the MTR [Mid-Term Review of the PRDP] found that very few (26%) of the surveyed sub-counties had activities which focused on the socio-economic reintegration of ex-combatants. Where activities were in evidence, they tended to focus on enhancing access for ex-combatants to government programmes such as NAADS [National Agricultural Advisory Services] and NUSAF [Northern Uganda Social Action Fund] rather than specifically designed programmes (ibid: 33).²⁴

Although in their design, development initiatives targeted formerly abducted people, such findings show that government programming for youth formerly-abducted by the LRA [has been] insufficient to meet their needs' (Annan *et al* 2008:44).

One major problem that has faced PRDP in its attempts to address post conflict recovery, reconstruction and development was/is lack of political will. Its public image was and continues to be tainted by allegations of corruption (Bertasi, 2013:43). Officials in the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and service providers have been accused of fund embezzlement: billions of shillings meant to help Ugandans affected by two decades of war rebuild their lives ended up building mansions for corrupt OPM officials in Kampala and buying luxury vehicles' (Daily Monitor, 2012, see also Bertasi, 2013:43). Embezzlement and mismanagement of funds led to offering sub-standard work or no work at all. Also, under pressure from Ugandans and the international community, the government of Uganda has been more concerned about normalising' the situation in northern Uganda (i.e. making sure the LRA did not return to the region and that IDP camps inmates could return home), than ensuring formerly abducted individuals were settling in well on their return home and achieving successful reintegration. Reintegration has been left to individuals, communities and community based organisations.

²⁴ Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) is a World Bank-funded development project divided into two phases. The first, worth \$133m, approved on 23rd July 2002 and closed on 31st March 2009 (see World Bank, 2002). The second phase, worth \$100m, was approved on 28th May 2009 (implementation started on 25 November) and will close on 29th February 2016 (see World Bank, 2015a). NUSAF does not target individuals or groups but communities: the project aims to empower communities in Northern Uganda by enhancing their capacity to systematically identify, prioritize, and plan for their needs and implement sustainable development initiatives that improve socio-economic services and opportunities' says the Bank's Website (World Bank, 2015).

The amnesty process was seen as the main vehicle for promoting dialogue and reconciliation. However, it was not responsive enough to the needs of formerly abducted individuals, their children born in the LRA camps. As demonstrated in the following chapters, such individuals continue to face stigmatisation and marginalisation in their villages, hindering their long-term reintegration. While stigma is the main obstacle to achieving successful social reintegration, lack of capacity to meet their basic needs exacerbates their situation. The reintegration experience of formerly abducted individuals shows the government of Uganda failing in both its duty of care and pledge to help them as set out in the Juba Peace Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation (see Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation, 2008) as well as the Agreement on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (see DDR document, 2008). This is particularly important given that in-community government development initiatives like NUSAF do not specifically target such individuals and their needs, but address vulnerable people in a general sense. Findings from the current research show that, lacking systematic external support, returning individuals have had and continue to rely on themselves and their immediate families to meet their pressing and long-term reintegration needs. For many, it is a difficult experience. Although the fighting in northern Uganda has stopped, and formerly displaced people have returned to their villages in large numbers, we still need to know how minority groups like formerly abducted people are coping with post conflict challenges and how they can be further assisted to achieve a successful long-term reintegration.

3.4 The Concept of Reintegration

Reintegration is a term that Muggah (2009:19) describes as still under-conceptualised and poorly understood by the various actors involved in making and executing the process (see also Nillson, 2005:1). Reintegration is identified as the most complex phase of the DDR process by which former soldiers have to find a civilian status, re-establish roots in the society, and gain sustainable employment and income (IDDRS, 2006:Section 6.3; see also Kingma, 2000:46; Ozerdem, 2009:21). This is fundamentally a *social* and *economic* process of development principally taking place in local communities (IDDRS, 2006: Section 6.3). Analysing reintegration in the context of sub-Saharan Africa, Kingma (2001:407) writes that reintegration is not one general process, but consists of thousands of micro-stories, with individual and group efforts and with setbacks and success.‘ He emphasises that the long-term objectives of the reintegration process are to enhance economic and human development and to foster and sustain

political stability, security and peace' (Kingma, 2001:407, 2000:46). Because it is part of the general development of a post-conflict country or region, it necessitates long-term external assistance (IDDRS, 2006: Section 6.3; UN 2000:15).

As the first phase of reintegration, *reinsertion* (also seen as the final part of the demobilisation phase) is defined as the short term arrival period of an ex-soldier into his or her former home. As mentioned earlier, during the *reinsertion* period, the ex-soldiers receive support mainly with basic household goods, food supplements, housing materials, and money, among others. Regarding the actual reintegration, which takes a long term approach to assisting the community and former soldiers in their transition to civilian life, this is often done through job placement services, skills training, credit schemes, scholarships, rehabilitation programmes etc. (IAWG.DDR, 2006:1.10:2; Specker, 2008:2). However, in cases where reintegration support is available and utilised, it usually lasts a year or less (Specker, 2008). Arguably, a year is not long enough for reintegration support in post-conflict situations where resources and economic opportunities are scarce for everyone. Although reinsertion support is expected to contribute to reintegration (and links demobilisation to reintegration), practice shows that reinsertion is also used as a reason for not giving any further assistance for actual reintegration. For example, in Uganda, since the reinsertion and rehabilitation assistance was not sustained by longer-term reintegration and development initiatives, the actual reintegration was left up to the individuals, their families and communities. The fact that the dividing line between reinsertion and reintegration has not been clearly defined (Specker, 2008) makes the contribution of reinsertion assistance thereto extremely difficult to measure.

To conceptualise reintegration further, being an open-ended process (IDDRS, 2006: Section 6.3), there is a need to clarify its duration, because it is not clear what is the preferred or expected outcome, or after how long this should be achieved. In northern Uganda, there is no systematic follow-up of what has happened to former child abductees who were reinserted back into their communities. Save for the Survey of War Affected Youth (SWAY), there is a gap in the literature about the long term socio-economic reintegration outcomes and experiences. The assumption that the former abductees have gone on to reintegrate 'well' in the communities could explain why policies, programmes and research targeting their long term reintegration are non-existent. Instead, there are only government supported initiatives coupled with NGO

programmes directed at vulnerable persons in general. This gap in the literature and lack of attention is not unique to the Ugandan post-conflict situation, where the child soldiers received tremendous attention immediately after exiting the armed group, but their long term progress and experience remain less explored.

Reintegration: Going back to what and where?

The *reintegration* process of former young soldiers is commonly described as involving family re-unification or returning to their communities of origin (IDDRS 2006:1.20; Jareg, 2005), with Ager (2006) explaining the importance and functions of the family to the war-affected young soldiers. Due to this assumption, former child soldiers are expected to rely on the families with whom they are reunited for moral and livelihood support. However, evidence shows that not all family reunifications yield the expected sustainable reintegration (see Wessells, 2007a; Barth, 2002). Often, individuals are reunited with families where they had problems before their recruitment. Studies like those of Wessells (2007a, 2007b), Barth, (2002) and Nilsson (2005), among others, show that, for various reasons, reintegration is not desired by all individuals. This applies to young soldiers who sometimes do not wish to go back to their old lives and instead desire to start over in areas away from their original communities. In Uganda, three months after the rescue of 300 such youths in 2004–2005, none was found residing in the community into which they were supposed to have been reintegrated (Akello *et al.*, 2006:229). In the current sample, 70 per cent of the participants were not living in their communities of origin, for reasons including stigmatisation, marriage and economic activities. This experience is not unique to Uganda. In Angola, after the war, ex-girl soldiers increasingly preferred to live apart from their families or to develop non-traditional family forms of relations. Of 40 former girl soldiers, 53 per cent lived in female-headed households—almost double the national average of 27 per cent (Stavrou, 2005; Wessells, 2007a). Similarly, as part of the re-unification programme in one district of Sierra Leone, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) reported that it had reunited 196 girls and young women with their families, but that after a few months, as many as 157 had left their families, and either returned to a *bush husband*, or gone to live with friends in urban areas (Coulter, 2010: note 3). Such cases of not remaining in the reintegration area show an inherent problem with the concept of *reintegration* as it denotes resettling in one's community of origin (Michael, 2006; Kingma, 1997a). In the case of re-settlement in a new community, the content of current reintegration programmes might need to be reconsidered (Tonheim, 2010).

Similarly, using the concept of 'reintegration' as a general term is misleading for some categories of child soldiers, including those recruited at a very young age and children born and raised in the armed forces. These categories spend most of their early childhood development with the armed groups and have nothing to re-integrate into. They have no experience or memory of pre-abduction/war patterns of life and, as they join the communities, they are basically beginning a new life. In this case, with no prior role in their communities to return to, talking about reintegration seems misleading because it is not an option for such individuals. This is also applicable to individuals returning to lost relatives and families, changed societies, again this is not reintegrating but beginning a new life, even if it is within the community of origin. In all these scenarios, the concept of 'reintegration' is misplaced, which is why some studies use, for example, the term 'integration' instead of 'reintegration' for such categories of former soldiers (see Knight & Ozerdem, 2004; Apio, 2008). However, this is different for returning former soldiers who locate their families and are supported, and have pre-recruitment memories and roles, because in such situations there is a structure to be re-integrated into (Nilsson, 2005:22).

Usually, as noted above, reintegration process of young former soldiers is commonly described as involving family reunification and returning to community of origin. Findings in this study support two arguments that: 1) reintegration process and experience vary largely among individuals, even from the same group and culture; 2) reintegration is a dynamic process whereby as community members receive and react to returning individuals (either negatively or positively), returnees are also equally actively involved in this process of creating a respectful relationship with the people in their communities. This is a complex and dynamic negotiation that eventually leads to either successful or failed reintegration. To understand how this process unfolds, why some individuals, and not others, are able to register successful reintegration, we need to examine further the question of 'going back to what and where'?

An analysis of community based socio-economic reintegration in the contexts of Acholi communities is the subject of discussion in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUCCESSFUL REINTEGRATION: A DEVELOPMENT PROCESS AND EXPERIENCE

Various studies have conveyed views of former young soldiers; particularly the reasons for their recruitment and their experiences within the armed groups, as well as their experiences after escaping or demobilisation (see Uvin, 2007; Chrobok & Akutu, 2008; Keairns, 2002; Boyden & de Berry, 2004). However, in the existing literature, there are no in-depth explanations to help us understand what aids long term reintegration or when it tends to be successful. The questions regarding the criteria or standards defining and measuring successful reintegration for ex-soldiers are still unasked and unanswered. As already noted, preferred outcomes of this process have not been effectively explored (Nilsson, 2005:13; Humphreys & Weinstein, 2007; Greenen, 2007). Humphreys & Weinstein (2007:532) write that ‘despite the confidence of policy makers in the impact of DDR programmes, there have been few systematic efforts to evaluate the determinants of successful reintegration by ex-combatants after conflict’. In the literature, we instead have statements and assumptions, based on actual experience from the attempts to reintegrate ex-soldiers, of what is believed to hinder them from engaging in further violence (Nilsson, 2005:13). In northern Uganda, the nature and determinants of successful reintegration remain poorly understood (Annan *et al.*, August 2009).

Social reintegration is considered a particularly complex and challenging process (IDDRS, 2006: section 4.30, 4) because, unlike the Disarmament and Demobilisation phases, it does not result in easily quantifiable results, such as the amount of weapons collected or the number of soldiers demobilised (Jareg, 2005:3; Chrobok, 2005:27). Bearing in mind that in-depth research addressing the local (and individual) perspective on the content and the preferred outcome of the social (and economic) reintegration process is still largely missing (Tonheim, 2009:54; 2010:24), long term reintegration continues to be based on assumptions. Veale and Shanahan (2010:116) argue that ‘if we see reintegration as a rational process, we also need to cast light on community perspectives’. Participants in Sendabo’s study in Liberia revealed what successful reintegration entails and the community’s expectations of former child soldiers in the long term:

When you see someone coming from fighting you have certain prejudices...when former child soldiers come back from the warfront and roam around, the community does not

accept them easily. People in the community have to see that these ex combatants are making some changes. Therefore reintegration is considered to have happened or successful *‘when the former child soldiers start to settle in the community, get married and start farming, gradually they become accepted’*. Only when they engage in activities of their community, members of the community admit them readily for faster reintegration. Only then the community feels much more comfortable with the former child soldiers return to their families and are accepted, the change of attitude from war to normal life starts. The more the children are accepted and become part of the society, the more they will be rehabilitated and reintegrated (Sendabo, 2004:66, emphasis added).

As already noted, reintegration does not take place in a vacuum but in an existing society framework, and successful reintegration calls for a cautious balancing and adjustments by the most important stakeholders to achieve equilibrium. Gradually, attitudes and perceptions of individuals, groups and society shift to accommodate and live with each other. This two-way street process and the relationships take time and hard work for all stakeholders. In order to understand the reintegration process and experiences of former girl abductees in any society, it is necessary to gain an understanding of the normal family and village structures of this society. As we have already seen in Chapter three, the current understanding of the term *‘reintegration’* implies stability and continuity of context. However, this is never the case. In the following subsection, before we explore social and economic reintegration, the thesis examines the socio-economic order and structure of Acholi, the society that the participants belonged to.

4.1 Acholiland

Acholiland (also known as Acholi sub-region)²⁵ is one of the seven sub-regions of Uganda. In the 1990s, Acholiland was made up of three districts of Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader. Four more districts have since been created out of the three initial districts as part of government decentralisation programme/policy: Lamwo, Agago, Amuru and Nwoya. The seven districts are further sub-divided into manageable sub-counties. Acholiland borders the Republic of South Sudan to the north, Karamoja to the east, Lango in the south and West Nile sub-region in the west (see Map 4.1).

²⁵ For a detailed political history and origin of Acholi people and culture, see Atkinson (1994).



Fig 4, 1: Map of Uganda showing Acholiland²⁶

From colonial times, compared to other sub-regions of the country, population in Acholi has always been small (see Girling, 1960:15). According to the 1991 Uganda census, the population of the Acholi sub-region was 746,796 people (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 1991). By 2002 the population had increased to 1,124,983, constituting 4.8% of the Ugandan population of 24.4 million. Based on the 2002 population Census, it was estimated that Acholiland's population in 2011 would be 1,572,900, representing a 110% increase in 20 years (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2002).

4.1.1 Socio-Economic Structure

The patriarchal setting in Acholi sub-region is based on extended families.²⁷ Acholi villagers are organized in households: a typical *dog gang*(household) consists of husband, wife(s), and

²⁶https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Atlas_of_Uganda

unmarried children, grandparents (parents to the husband), unmarried siblings, offspring of deceased siblings, among other relatives (the Ugandan Census defines a household as ‘a group of persons who normally *live* and *eat* together’ (2014:16, italics original)). Members of such a household share a compound with their houses (circular huts with a high peak, finished in mud) facing each other while acknowledging the authority of the household head, who in most cases is a father/husband. Under normal circumstances, as head of the family, the father or husband has absolute control over decision making in the household. He protects, guides, and carries the responsibility of up keeping the family. On the other hand, the wife also is a great contributor to the maintenance of the family, particularly in child bearing and rearing, as well as in providing domestic and farming services. Youth will only be considered adults after getting married and giving birth. Until then, they are not in position to take on responsibilities within their clans and villages (we return to this in Chapter Seven). Even in adulthood, a person’s lineage and *kaka* (clan) is held legally responsible for his or her actions throughout their life.

Family in Acholi is the primary institution for socialization and for passing on cultural norms and values. It is also the foundation upon which the Acholi clan system relies for its smooth functioning. A *kaka* (clan) can be defined as a small unit of social organization made up of many families who trace their origin to a common ancestor (all Acholi share the same heritage and culture) (see Girling, 1960; Artkinson, 1994). Clan elders by definition are the most senior people in this family circle (*kaka*). They have the responsibility to transfer and preserve culture, tradition and knowledge to younger generations. Because they are the regulators of the clans and represent them at the village level, these leaders have always been highly respected in the family and villages (see Girling, 1960; Artkinson 1994). These are the familial and ethnical customs and institutions upon which the integrity and cultural development of Acholi people depend, and their children are brought up to recognise and respect this custom and hierarchy.

A group of households in an area make up a *caro* (village/hamlet).²⁸ During the colonial period, families of a similar *kaka* occupied a *caro* (Girling, 1960:7; 21), but this social order and

²⁷ The study is referring to the family as it is organised in rural areas (where most participants resided), not as nuclear family found in urban centres but the extended family.

²⁸ For present purposes, the terms village (*caro*) and community (*lwak*) are used synonymously.

organisation later began altering, with clan families dispersed throughout Acholiland and beyond. In search of fertile soils, water, green pastures and employment, families and individuals moved from village to village or outside of Acholi sub-region. When war broke out, people relocated to IDP camps, left villages for towns and other districts or moved abroad. Some displaced people have not returned to their villages of origin following the end of fighting (they are either settling in new villages or still in former camps that have turned into village trading centres). Importantly, due to increasing competition for, and dispute over land among clans and villages (see Hetz & Myers, 2006; Phuong & Vinck, 2010:28; Vaughan & Stewart, 2011:4; IRIN, 2011), people are forced to stay away from their clan land/village and resort to attempts to access land elsewhere. In current village settings, we now have people of different lineages and clans under the administration of a local government leader (Local Council One (Chairman LC1)).

The war and displacement of people has changed Acholi: there is no community in terms of what was...In essence the conflict has broken down the very fabric of Acholi society (Veale and Stavrou, 2002:28 as cited in McKay & Mazurana, 2004:38). Compared to other Ugandan ethnic groups, the culture of Acholi was distinct, with stronger marriage and kinship systems. Things were always done within a clan setting (see Girling, 1960). Family and clan leaders relied on community-building practices to govern homesteads and villages. One of these practices worth mentioning here is *wangoo* (translated as evening fireplace discussion/compound fire). Among other social events, homestead and clan elders used the forum provided by the *wangoo* institution to elaborate to children and youth issues deemed vital including cultural demands/expectations and behaviour of different categories of people:

Before the war, and in spite of the advent of modernisation and western ways of life, Acholi's culture was very strong. The socio-cultural institutions regulated everyday life, with men, women and children aware of what was required of them. Children were taught at the *wangoo* and knew their roles as looking after the compound, supporting their fathers in home management, farming and for the girls helping their mothers in the kitchen and weeding. What Acholi culture instilled in children is respect, discipline and obedience (a clan elder, as quoted in Ochen, 2014:234).

Also, through *wangoo*, cultural values, customs and policies were passed from elders to the future generations. It was also a place of entertainment and folk tales that every person in a

homestead looked forward to at the end of each day. To quote the Acholi novelist and anthropologist, Okotp'Bitek,

Towards sunset, as the day's work is over, you can see, moving along narrow pathways, in single file, groups of men and boys, carrying logs or branches of wood, as well as their hoes. You can also hear the flutes of the herds—boys bringing the cattle home. The women and girls have returned home from the gardens much earlier to prepare the evening meal and to do other domestic chores. On arrival, the younger boys take turns to make the outdoor fire —Mac wangOo”, whilst the older men have their hot baths. Soon, all those not otherwise engaged, come and sit around the fire, waiting for supper. The stage is set for talking folk tales (1962:1).

Being the main meeting place for all family members, *wangoo* was an important part of every homestead. *Wangoo* discussions were in most cases led by the overall homestead head. Apart from being a forum for 'informal education' through which children and youth learned respect for hierarchy and authorities, *wangoo* was also a time to feed everyone in a homestead (ibid). Cultural practices like *wangoo* were strong cultural safety nets for the upbringing of orphans and taking care of the most vulnerable in the family and community. Because of their interdependent construct of personhood (we discuss this later in this chapter), such community-building practices aimed at discouraging discrimination and marginalisation of the most vulnerable:

The Acholi traditional society thrived on communalism, collective action and respect and observance for long established traditions and institutions. Such included the norms for child upbringing and general relations among children and parents and other people within the society. Many social events were organised to encourage social integration and the appreciation of the society cultures among its own children. In Acholiland we have always said that orphans would be fed via the *wangoo*. This was based on the fact that in any Acholi homestead food would be served outside at the *wangoo* and all people would eat together. Selfishness was discouraged and all women were compelled to cook and bring food for everyone within that homestead..., (a clan elder, as quoted in Ochen, 2014:243).

Although such cultural practices and dependence on kinship systems survived events of colonialism, immigrations, religion and trade, the effects of war eventually eroded them. When the war was intense, the primary concern for families was survival (food and security). Instead of looking forward to *wangoo*, families worried about where to spend a night. Frequently people left their homes and slept in the bush. Government later forced them to move into Internally Displaced Persons camps. In the confined space of a camp, the link between people and their important cultural institutions like *wangoo* were completely broken: 'because of lack of

firewood, imposed curfews, and the dense population of camps with huts built quite close together, *wango* 'oo was no longer feasible or safe' (Gauvin, 2013:39). The IDP camp conditions were 'vectors of social break down' (Dolan, 2009:69). Living in camps for over a decade, people were cut off from the culture that had nurtured them for generations and were forced to adopt new understanding/view of life: 'people are not only physically displaced from their home, but also from where they socially belong'...in the IDP camp, the spatial and temporal rhythms of daily life in homestead and village—the centre of Acholi society in rural life—were disrupted, transforming gender and age roles and relations in the extended family' (Baines &Gauvin, 2014:2). Because extended familial/kin networks did not end up in the same camp (people from different clans were mixed up), communication and dependence on these relations were also strained and gradually weakened: 'in a camp, a new household came into being without extended approval and support' (ibid: 8). Although people have returned to their villages, life continues to be about survival. Community-building practices like *wango* have become a thing of the past.

The greatest impact of displacement seems to have been on familial kinship networks and wider social organization (see Okello&Hovil, 2007; Hovil, 2012; Whyte *et al.* 2013; Baines &Gauvin, 2014). In these new rural Acholi settings,dependence on familial relations and village social structure continues to be put under extreme strain by mistrusts, cultural degradation, lack of productivity and widespread poverty. Gender and age role transformation is also observable throughout these villages. Such is the social and cultural context in which many formerly abducted individuals and formerly displaced people are attempting to reintegrate, rebuild their lives, by themselves with limited support from their families.

Relationship and Selfhood

While extended familial unit and societal organization has been left disrupted, social structure and socio-cultural conceptions of personhoodin Acholi, like in many African contexts remains interdependent constructed. Beattie (1980) writes that Africans are extremely sensitive to the interdependencies among people and view themselves and others in the world as extensions of one another: the 'self' is viewed not as a closed and independent but as an open field. This implies that the 'self' is viewed not as a closed and independent but as an open field—this is known as the *interdependent construal of the self* (see Markus &Kitayama, 1991). In Acholi, for an individual to belong and be recognised, connection/relationship and views of other people

(clan and non-clan members) in immediate settings carry vast influence. The interdependent representation/view of self is still common in Acholi, and can be illustrated as follows.

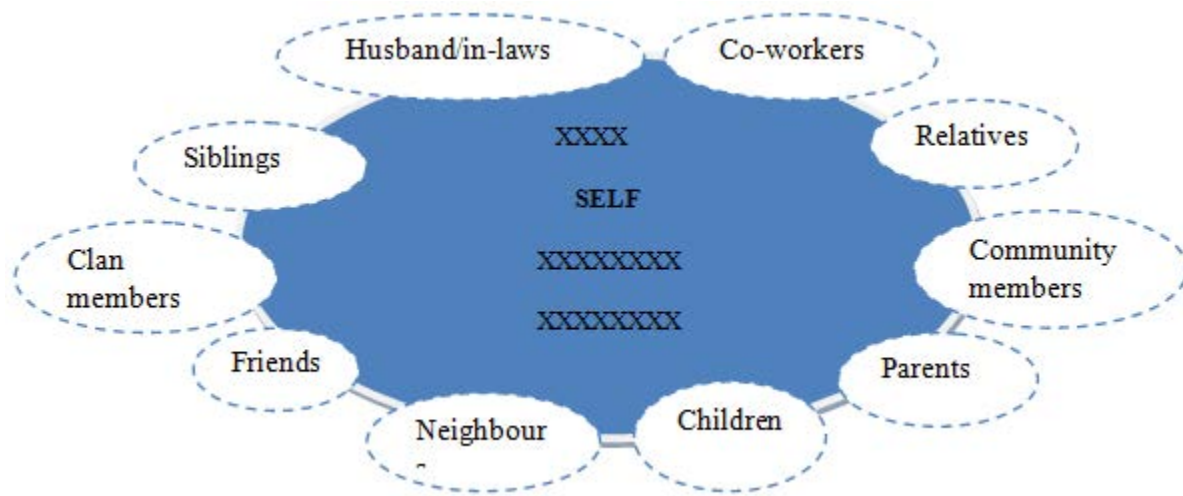


Fig 4, 2: Interdependent view of self in Acholi

As illustrated in the figure, the significant self-representation (s) includes relationship to others. This implies that selfhood is viewed as interdependent with surrounding contexts, and it is the other or the self-in-relation-to-other that is focal in an individual experience: most Acholi people derive their wellbeing by caring for the wellbeing of others first...the human condition of the Acholi people collectively is secondary to their human relationships...their common humanity dictate their actions regardless of the human conditions pertaining on the ground (Ofumbi, 2012:117). An Acholi is not defined as an independent individual/self but in terms of social relations and groups one functions within, from family and clan, and spreading out to the relationships within the wider village (p'Bitek 1986; Oloya, 2010, Porter, 2012; 2013). Acknowledging that the fullness of self exists only within the bonds of familial and kinship relations, p'Bitek wrote that, man is not born free. He cannot be free. He is incapable of being free. For only by being in chains can he be and remain human. What constitutes these chains? Man has a bundle of *duties* which are expected from him by society, as well as a bundle of *rights* and *privileges* that the society owes him' (1986:19). This interdependent construct is in contrast to Western view of an individual as an independent, self-contained, autonomous entity who (a) comprises a unique configuration of internal attributes (e.g., traits, abilities, motives, and values) and (b) behaves primarily as a consequence of these internal attributes (Markus

&Kitayama, 1991:224). Geertz (1975:48) writes that in Western culture, a person is viewed as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against a social and natural background'. Unlike in Western cultures and understandings, where *separateness* of an individual is preferred and promoted, in Acholi *connectedness* is upheld where an individual is not seen as separate from the social context but as more connected to others: the key word defining their [Acholis] lives is –connectedness” ... that describes their ethnic group, relationships between people humans and God, and relationships with the rest of creation’ (Ofumbi, 2012:116, see also Porter, 2012; 2013). This explains why in most cases, it is unlikely that a formerly abducted person will choose to integrate in unfamiliar contexts (in isolation of his or her people and culture). All the above reinforce the importance of family and kinship reunification and acceptance to formerly abducted individuals. Inability to find their families or/and cordially living with them threatens formerly abducted persons’ opportunity to re-belong and redeem their social status. Also this *connectedness* or the expectation of it explains why formerly abducted persons find the stigma and ridicule they receive from their family and village members painful and incomprehensible. But most importantly, with the extended family and clan relations continuously loosening and weakening, household poverty escalating, tensions among people going unresolved, this *connectedness* is becoming endangered. Current reintegration literature focuses on individual or group experiences. The communities are often viewed as being static and unchanged, and therefore able, willing to accept and embrace the returnees. However, with changed and troubled formerly abducted children returning to a complex and changing society like Acholi sub-region, reintegration discourse cannot afford to focus on individual process and experiences only. To get a balanced analysis, we need to cast our attention to the social and economic dynamics of host communities as well.

Livelihoods

With regard to household livelihoods in Acholi sub-region, there is still heavy dependence on peasant farming for both consumption and exchange (Ministry of Finance, 2003:9; Finnstrom, 2008). Land thus remains an important livelihood capital. It is estimated that up to 95 per cent of land in Acholi is still held under customary tenure, with penetration of freehold remaining

marginal (Adoko& Levine, 2005; Hetz& Myers, 2006). Atkinson wrote that before the war and displacement:

Land rights were overwhelmingly customary and communal, not private, and were vested in localized patrilineal clans or sub-clans. Not all who lived and farmed on communal clan land were clan members; friends, in-laws, and others could be given access to use – but not own – clan land. And an individual clan member who was also a household head had personal claim to land that he and his wife (or wives) had under cultivation, or that had been cultivated but was lying fallow, and such rights passed from father to son. But ultimate rights to the land were based in clans (Atkinson, 2007 as quoted in Foley, 2007:35).

Individual males thus have claims on patrilineal clan land. This access is through and controlled by the localized patrilineal lineages and clans under the guidance of lineage elders. As was the case before the war and displacement, men are still given a priority over access to land, with females accessing and using it only through husbands and fathers (see Atkinson, 1994; 2004; 2008; Human Rights Focus, 2013).

Foods that are eaten routinely as staples are sorghum and eleusine (finger) millet. Families are predominantly peasant mixed farmers who grow a variety of crops for cash and family consumption, including peas, beans, maize, leafy green vegetables, cassava, simsim (sesame seeds), ground nuts (peanuts), and cotton, among others (see also Atkinson, 1994:54; Finnström, 2008). Although agriculture remains important in village life, compared to the situation described by the anthropologist Girling (1960), there is less dependency on crop production in present-day Acholi. In relation to women in agriculture, he wrote that:

the average number of fields of food crop per married woman is about three...most women have no cotton fields and few men have any food crops (p.190)... On average, an Acholi household maintains the following crops: each wife, or mature female in the household, *min ot*, hut mother, as she is known in Acholi, maintains two fields of millet, one field of sesame, a small plot each of beans, spinach, ground nuts, peas, and gourds. There are other crops which are interplanted with the main ones, and which come to maturity at different times (p.191).

The custom of cultivation as an obligation for households and individuals has been weakened by the lengthy war, and desire to participate in paid employment and trading (which bring in more cash). Unlike the three ‘cultivation fields’ Girling talks about, women currently maintain an individual *poto* (‘cultivation field’/ ‘garden’) close to their homes, adopting little in the way of intensification techniques and making minimal if any use of hired labour.

In the 1930s, people in northern Uganda took up *pamba* (cotton) production (see Mamdani, 1976). As a cash crop in Uganda, cotton became a man's produce in Acholi. An individual man maintained a number of cotton fields separate from the wife's or wives' food crop fields (Girling, 1960:191). While women were habitually responsible for food crop production while men concentrated on cotton cultivation, this changed when coffee replaced cotton as Ugandan's cash crop (see Mamdani, 1976). Due to harsh climate and the colonial policy of divide and rule, coffee production did not spread to northern Uganda as was the case in the southern part of the country. With cotton production becoming unprofitable, men turned to food crop production, domestic animal keeping and seeking employment in the army and police. Today, only a few households still grow cotton, usually on a smaller scale than previously. For example, only two women in our sample reported that their households had attempted to grow cotton in the last two years.

The study participants came from poor peasant families who use only family labour. Both men and women use simple tools: *kwei* (pl. *kweri*, 'hoe'), panga machete and axe. For most households, planting decisions are made principally with an eye toward what their family will need for subsistence during the coming season and not market prices. The gardens that this author observed during field work were less than an acre in size each. Some of their owners practised crop monoculture (growing the same crop (s) on the same piece of land year after year), while others carried out mixed cropping where two or more crops were grown on the same area of *poto* simultaneously. Nearer to their homes, some households maintained smaller gardens on which they produce tomatoes and leafy green vegetables to supplement their diets. In most cases, due to soil depletion, limited labour and irregularity of the rainfall, yields are reportedly poor.

There are different explanations of why women currently do less cultivation; for instance women in pre-and post-colonial times relied heavily on community work groups/teams, hired young men to cultivate their fields or used ox-ploughs. Many households are no longer able to access or hire this kind of external labour, and/or are too poor to afford ox-ploughs. Instead, people work their garden themselves with the help of household labour. Unlike in the colonial times where women and men were able to maintain separate plots (Girling, 1960:191), both women and men now have to depend on each other's labour to maintain a family *poto*. Gendered division of labour in

household is still observed as was documented by Girling (1960:7) and Atkinson (1994:60). The man is expected to perform the heavy agricultural work including clearing the bush, ground breaking (prepare the garden) and harvesting. The women plant, weed the garden, collect the harvest and process the food. Girls and boys are generally socialized into these diverse gender roles and domestic chores accordingly.

Although crop cultivation has always been the primary livelihood in this region, many Acholi people also have always been cattle keepers (p'Bitek, 1971:19; Atkinson, 1994:56–57). Apart from cattle being viewed as the principal sign of wealth, people depended on the animals for food and ploughing for large scale agricultural production. However, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, almost all the cattle and other livestock (including poultry) in Acholi were stolen, by government soldiers, fighters in opposition movements, or—mainly—by Karamajong²⁹ (Weeks, 2002:35; IRIN, 2003). The loss of cattle threw almost the whole of the Acholi ethnic group into extreme poverty and destitution (Finnström, 2008:71), a situation worsened by population displacement and long residence in IDP camps. Taken together, these further left households weakened with their main livelihood activity, cultivation, adversely affected. So, in recent years, to complement their crop production, some people keep domestic animals, including chickens, goats, sheep, pigs, and cattle, among others. In rural Acholi, someone is considered well off if they keep domestic animals, particularly cattle. Also, because villagers increasingly depend on cash earnings to supplement their agricultural incomes, villagers are investing in small scale trade.

Welcoming/Cleansing Ceremonies

Writing *Men without God* in 1966, Russell, discussing Acholi culture, noted that ‘the evidence of the present shows overwhelmingly that clan ritual is not dying out. Probably 90% of the homes in Acholi still have connection with the clan ritual at times of need’ (p.26). Although religion, education, modernity and civil wars have had an impact on how people view and interpret

²⁹Karamoja is one of the poorest and most violent places in the northeast (Kenya–Uganda border), where cattle raiding has a long and well-established history. The Karamajong live separately from the rest of Ugandans in a traditional and highly stratified society centred on cattle, which figure prominently in all aspects of life, including status, religious and ceremonial and marriage practices (see Novelli, 1988; Ochieng, 2000). They often seek out cattle in armed raids on neighbouring ethnic groups, even across the border into northern Kenya. Traditionally, a cattle raid was originally carried out with spears, but in modern times the Karamajong have adopted the use of automatic weapons, variously stolen from or supplied by the government and other allies, in Sudan, Somalia and Kenya (Eaton 2008:89; Gray, 2000; Jabs, 2007).

tradition in Acholi, villagers in this Ugandan area continue to practise rich and sophisticated cultural ceremonies and rituals. These influence their attitudes and values towards acceptance, forgiveness, truth, justice and reconciliation. An individual is deeply rooted in his/her *kaka* and community (see Atkinson, 1994, 1999). A person's good health, happiness and spiritual welfare are based on the harmony between the individual and her/his *kaka* and wider community, with ancestral and religious spirits providing guidance on how to maintain such social harmony (see Porter; 2012; 2013). Equally, if an individual disrupts this harmony by failing to observe societal and moral codes, this may anger the ancestral *jogi* ('spirits'), leading them to visit retribution on the individual, as well as his or her clan and wider community: 'social suffering is a result of the deliberate attempt to disrespect Acholi culture, values and spirituality' (Bernstein, 2009:20; see also Baines, 2005; Behrend, 1999). In her research in Acholi sub region, Baines found that:

Historically, the good health and happiness of the Acholi individual was always situated in the context of the harmony and well-being of the clan. The ancestral and religious spirit worlds provided guidance to the Acholi people, maintaining the unity of the clan. Conversely, conflicts misfortune and poor health could be 'sent' by angry spirits and extended not only to the violators of the moral codes, but to his or her family or clan. Thus, one person's actions always had ramifications for his or her family and clan who in turn assumed collective responsibility for the offence (2005:11).

Retribution from *jogi* may be manifest in the form of misfortune or illness called *cen* ('vengeance ghost' or 'ghostly vengeance' (p'Bitek, 1980)).³⁰ In Baines' study, Acholi cultural elders explained this phenomenon as:

...the entrance of an angry spirit into the physical body of a person or persons that seeks appeasement, usually in the form of a sacrifice or, in the case of a 'wrongful death', compensation and reconciliation between the clan of the offended and offender. The spirit manifests as *cen*, which will 'haunt' the wrongdoers by entering their mind or body in the form of visions and nightmares that may result in mental illness and sickness until the wrong is made right. *Cen* can also send nightmares and sickness to the rest of the family of the individual involved, so threatens not only the individual, but the family and community (2005:12).

Cen is visible in an individual who participated in an unresolved murder or accidental death, or has come across the body of someone who was killed violently. According to Acholi beliefs, the spirits of such dead people will haunt the area in order to avenge their death, so *cen* may possess

³⁰In Western terms and psychiatry applicability, one can relate *cen* to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that is framed in locally informed 'spectra of distress and bad experience' (Finnström, 2008:160).

an individual who passes through such an area (Baines, 2005; Harlacher, 2009). Based on this, forest, woodland and wilderness areas in war-affected northern Uganda and South Sudan are perceived to be places inhabited by wandering spirits of the dead. Roaming and living in these areas made formerly abducted people potential vehicles of *cen*. It is difficult to determine how the impact of *cen* varies, but it seems the more *cen* one experiences, the greater its consequence. The latter become manifest when the person who has been exposed to *cen* starts behaving in what is considered a socially and morally disturbed way, before becoming violent and eventually lapsing into insanity. *Cen* can be transferred to the second generation of the ‘possessed’; for example, a baby can be born with *cen*, if either parent was possessed; or, if not exorcised or ‘cleansed’, *cen* may be transmitted down the generations of the lineage of a carrier (Baines, 2005:12; Finnström, 2008:160). *Cen* does not only target someone’s personality; but also impacts his or her social and economic wellbeing as well.

This explains why Acholi families, clan and villagers saw it as their responsibility to help their formerly abducted children to set things right by performing cleansing rituals to appease the spirits, whose other responsibility is righting wrongs. Thus, ritual performance (s) provides the remedy for containing and stopping *cen* from causing harm to an individual, his or her family and the general community (Finnström, 2008:160). Acknowledgement of wrongdoing is articulated through ritual, and successful completion of purification breaks the spirit’s hold on the individual, and frees them from their deadly past. The justification of former child abductees going through cultural reintegration initiatives relies on this vital spiritual world view.

Acholi culture is rich in traditional rites for a variety of purposes ranging from births to funerals; however, for present purposes, the concern is on the cleansing rituals related to reintegration that most interviewees participated in. Different rituals target the perceived requirement of: individuals who have been away for a long time; those presumed dead; those who were abducted but did not kill anybody during captivity; and those who had killed people. For example, Okumu (2005), Behrend (1999a:42), Harlacher, (2009) and Bines (2005) all describe the welcoming and cleansing ceremony *nyono-tong-gweno* (stepping on the egg). Harlacher (2009:166) and Bines (2005) explain the purpose and procedures of *lwoko-pi-kwang* (washing away the tears) and *kwero-merok* (cleansing someone who has killed) (see also Girling, 1960:103–104; Wright, 1936:186; p’Bitek, 1971). Because fieldwork was done at a time when most of the participants

had already gone through these rituals, the author did not observe any of the cleansing rituals mentioned here. She relies on the interviews and existing literature to analyse the study participants' experiences of going through these rituals in this Chapter.

Upon successful family reunification, some participants were approached by their parents to reveal whether they had done 'something bad' like engaging in killings. A mother of three formerly abducted children (2 girls and a boy) explained how she approached the issue: 'I was not able to ask Sunday (eldest daughter) many questions. I only asked her one question that, "could you have done something bad there [captivity]" and then she said, "I did not". I was asking her so that I try to get the right traditional ritual to cleanse her of any bad thing.'³¹ Confessing to having killed or witnessed a murder caused the family to perform extra rituals with a deeper meaning and effectiveness like *lwoko-pi-kwang* (washing away the tears, performed for somebody presumed dead) and *kwero-merok* (cleansing someone who has killed). Although in most cases, clan elders preside over these ceremonies, family, on the behalf of their daughter or son negotiates, organises and provides an environment (compound or field) for the ritual performance (see also Mpyangu, 2010:109-111).

The village members that participated in group discussions argued that formerly abducted people *must* go through the 'right' rituals for them to be: free of *cen*, fully accepted back in their villages and successfully reintegrate. However, what is striking is how most formerly abducted persons perceive this cultural belief and initiative. Early in the research, it was assumed that failure to access the right ritual would act as a constraint on successful reintegration. However, many women in our sample appeared to pay little or no attention to this aspect of their return/reintegration. For example, apart from participants whose families did not believe in their effectiveness or could not afford the items needed for their performance,³² or were orphans without sponsors to initiate and preside over arrangements, the majority of women who missed out on the rituals had simply refused to participate in them. Such women dismissed the rituals as

³¹ Mother to CM05

³² Participants who went through *Lwoko-Pig-Wang* or/and *Kwero-merok* could not confirm how much they cost as they had not been directly responsible for meeting the expenditures associated with the rituals. Costs were met by sponsors like fathers, uncles, brothers or the reception centre. We estimate between 60,000-100,000 Ugandan shillings (\$24-40) were spent on the complete *Lwoko Pig Wang* or *Kwero-merok*.

‘useless’ or ‘waste’ of time. One argued that the performance of rituals could actually evoke *cen* in her and her four children, to justify refusal to partake in any of them. Other women justified participation by explaining that ‘the elders [family/clan] wanted/asked me to do it’, ‘the elders said it will help/free me’, ‘I was subjected to it’ and ‘I had gotten saved’ (see also Annanet *al.* 2006). It is hard to determine, from the perspective of returnees, whether and how effective the rituals are or have been, particularly where there was little initial desire for, or belief in, the rituals in the first place.

While at reception centres, formerly abducted persons were introduced and converted to Christianity, Pentecostalism in particular: ‘several centres allow[ed] the children to undergo traditional healing or cleansing ceremonies, while others discourag[e]d this in preference to Christian religious ceremonies’ (McKay & Mazurana, 2004:83). This conversion has led to reduced interest in or rejection of traditional rituals (see Quinn, 2009:7). The adoption of religious beliefs is definitely transforming the understanding of cleansing ceremonies and Acholi spiritual worldviews in general. The findings provide support for Jalobo’s observation that ‘the pendulum of beliefs among the Acholi (...) keeps swinging from traditional African to either Christianity, Islam and vice-versa, depending on how natural calamities visit an individual in a society’ (1999:1). Thus converted returnees sometimes negotiated their acceptance in villages by participating in thanksgiving prayers led by a local religious leader, either at their homes or in local churches. However, if the family head still believed in traditional rituals and could afford the cost of their performance, returnees had little choice but to undergo the rituals. There are also cases where, after undergoing the rituals organised by families, an individual goes ahead to organise religious cleansing, which they considered more appropriate. It is not clear whether combining traditional and religious ceremonies can actually have negative consequences for an individual’s wellbeing. What is certain is that women in our sample who went through the traditional rituals can still go for church prayers (see also Quinn, 2009:7). We later analyse whether cleansing rituals aid long term reintegration.

4.2 Social and Economic Reintegration

Although the Paris Principles (2007:2.9) emphasise that successful reintegration is achieved when the *political, legal, economic and social* conditions needed for reintegrating individuals to maintain life, livelihood and dignity have been secured, the concern in this study remains the two

gradual societal processes—social and economic reintegration—that we turn to in the following sections.

4.2.1 Social Reintegration

Kingma (2001:407, 2000:46) defines *social reintegration* as ‘the process through which the ex-combatant and his or her family feel part of, and are accepted by the community.’ The key issue of social reintegration is the ability of an individual to live among other people (acceptance) in the community. A community based Participatory Action Research (PAR) involving approximately 658 child mothers (with and without military background) living in three war-torn countries—Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Northern Uganda—found that successful social reintegration for formerly abducted child mothers is measured through their *acceptance* as actors and contributors in their families and communities (McKay *et al.*, 2010). Similar determinants of successful reintegration were documented in a study by Save the Children in 2004 in which the 211 participants, young Sierra Leonean soldiers, defined successful reintegration as ‘being loved and cared for by their families, being accepted and welcomed by the community, and living in peace and unity with others’. Generally, acceptance at family and community level is considered an important factor for thriving reintegration (see Annan *et al.*, 2006, 2008; Betancourt *et al.*, 2008; Boothby *et al.*, 2006; Corbin, 2008; McKay & Mazurana, 2004:83). These definitions and descriptions of social reintegration offer valuable themes for analysis in the current study because of the broad base from which they address this societal process.

The evidence suggests that the individual is initially accepted (not immediately rejected) to rejoin the community but lives under observation of how she or he behaves among other people. This is an important phase of social reintegration because it determines whether an individual will eventually be fully accepted or not—possibly what Kingma calls achieving, *feeling* part of the society. However, Kingma’s definition of social reintegration poses challenges to the process whereby he does not define the determinants of *feeling* part of the society or after how long an ex-abductee should declare feeling part of the community. In the case of northern Uganda, this definition is challenging, because the former child abductees returned to families and communities that were heavily damaged by the lengthy conflict and camp system. It is possible that the communities were actually more wounded, so how does one feel part of such a community?

The quotation we saw earlier from Liberia offers a further perspective on social reintegration. It suggests that acceptance and ‘feeling part’ of the community come with time (this may take years). As an individual goes on reintegrating, the community changes its perceptions and attitudes towards the individual(s) based on her or their progress in ‘normalising’/socialising. Factors to consider at this stage are attempting to engage in marriage, engaging in village events like other ‘ordinary’ people, and livelihoods. Sierra Leonean former girl soldiers identified similar indicators of progressive social reintegration, including family support, marriage and involvement in communal activities (Stark *et al.*, 2009). In Mozambique, former male child soldiers associated successful reintegration with ‘just being like others’, or ‘being normal’ (Boothby *et al.*, 2006). However, if ‘being like others’ denotes successful reintegration, then this goal appears to be unattainable for many former female soldiers who, after years of trying, now feel that they may never ‘be like’ anyone or everyone else. During their time with armed forces, these are people who may have ended up with behavioural problems or ‘anti-social behaviour’ (violent, aggressive, quarrelsome, using offensive/foul language, etc.) during their time in captivity, which affects the way they relate to other people (McKay & Mazurana, 2004:36; McKay, 2004:25, 2006:102). These may be hard to break, even after years of being in normal society. However, the opposite may also be true. When an individual socially progresses and achieves what others have, say acceptance or a stable marriage, that is and should be seen as positive reintegration.

A Ugandan Survey of War Affected Youth indicated that former female soldiers have been accepted and have gone on to live relatively successful lives and are no more violent than their peers. The authors further write that a minority of formerly abducted females exhibit serious psychosocial reintegration difficulties, whether in the form of distress or persistent community and family rejection, prompting them to note that former girl and women soldiers are strong and resilient and not traumatized pariahs (Annan *et al.*, 2008a). This assumption of equating successful reintegration to the absence of family and community rejection was shared by some of the reintegration agency staff interviewed for the present study. Current findings show that reintegration is not a straightforward and monolithic concept, but a complex, ongoing process. Analysing reintegration, changes and differences between individuals and categories of people in various contexts, such as social, economic, cultural and spiritual, should therefore be brought into consideration. Although optimistic outcomes of reintegration, including good family

relationships, resilience, and psychological strength, are documented with the participants, the current study treats them as indications of change and progress made by the women, their families and communities over time. Such positive outcomes/findings should not contribute to assumptions that the former abductees do not need support with their reintegration, but instead should stimulate further questions about the women's agency, relationships and how they use basic cultural resources in mediating their own reintegration (Veale & Shanahan, 2010:116). Such constructive findings reveal that the dynamics of successful reintegration are far more complex than simply grading former abductees as *'traumatised'* or *'resilient'* (ibid.).

The findings also show that, as the hosts of reintegration, there is a need to focus on the family and village settings, and how the existing resources in these settings can aid the reintegration process (see also Sendabo, 2004). Usually, family and village initiatives are an important way to begin this process. In some African communities, initiatives like rituals to welcome and cleanse individuals are a fundamental consideration if an individual is to be accepted in the community (see, for example, Wessells & Monteiro, 2001; McKay & Mazurana, 2004; Honwana, 2006). Exploring the role of Gamba spirits and healers in post-war recovery in Mozambique, Igreja (2003:461) writes that, *'the availability of, accessibility of and quality of local resources play a vital role in the recovery process because they provide a rationale of suffering that fits with explanatory models of the traumatized individual and families'*. In Angola and Mozambique, Honwana (2006:104) shows how local traditional welcoming and cleansing rituals were used to reintegrate and heal the former child soldiers. These cultural practices are not unique to Mozambique and Angola; as discussed earlier, they resemble those found in Uganda's Acholi where such traditional initiatives are similarly fundamental if an individual is to achieve community acceptance. In such African societies, cultural and holistic view of healing is preferred. In order to be effective and sustainable, reintegration of former child soldiers needs to be embedded in local world views (see Honwana, 2006; Wessells & Monteiro, 2001:262; Teuton *et al.* 2007).

Literature argues that former girl soldiers benefit from traditional rituals (McKay & Mazurana, 2004:49), but it does not explicitly explain in what sense the girls *'benefit'*. Interviews in Acholi suggest that rituals impact social reintegration as a process and experience. Apart from signifying the conclusion of procedures of returning home, the performance of rituals intends to serve two

purposes: family and village acceptance; and erasing the stigma that comes with associating with the rebels. The literature and interviews show that on an individual level, cleansing plays an important role in facilitating social reintegration, signifying acceptance in a family, clan and village. Generally, undergoing the appropriate ritual(s) implies that an individual has been formally accepted back in her or his family, clan and also in the wider village. It is therefore enormously comforting and reassuring to formerly abducted individuals that they are welcome with open hands and warmth when they first return, even if this is mostly by immediate family/clan. Following the completion of the rituals, an individual is granted privileges that come with village membership including freedom of association at all levels, seeking employment and engaging in marriage, among others. Rituals are also practical means for the host family and village to demonstrate their consent, their forgiveness and stakeholder-ship in an individual's reintegration. Going through the rituals implies that, in terms of returning home process, individuals achieve formal acceptance and are assumed to be in a better social position compared to those who do not. In theory, undergoing such rituals is one way for an individual to upgrade from rebel status to an ordinary, accepted and respected village member.

As highlighted earlier, rituals in Acholi also signify a chance to heal the effects of *cen*. When formerly abducted person goes on to live a normal life (with no psychological and anti-social behaviour), the rituals are assumed to have had a positive impact. However, this has not been so for many formerly abducted individuals who go on to suffer severe psychological effects of war, including those who went through some sophisticated cleansing. Among the women in our sample, 54% (n=31) still suffered with frequent symptoms of emotional distress, secondary effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) including: being easily irritated, fear, paranoia, lack of concentration, nightmares and flashes, loneliness, feeling helplessness, boredom, feeling unloved and useless, over-thinking, sadness, isolation, frustrations with others among others. Asked how the experience of soldiering in captivity was still affecting their wellbeing, one of the participants shared the fear she coped with on a daily basis:

...at times it is like I have a hollow in my head and it makes an irritating buzzing sound...Also, when I hear a sharp sound like that of a grinding mill, it quickly takes me back to the recollection of a military helicopter hovering over us...it always feels like I

am actually hearing my enemies [UPDF] chasing us...these thoughts bring back bush life memories...³³

Such daily psychological disruptions make their life back home a daily test of their coping and resiliency capacities. A study conducted on the psychological resilience of youth in northern Uganda, the authors did not find a significant difference in occurrence of nightmares in individuals who were cleansed and those that were not (Annan & Blattman, 2006). From a psychological point of view, emotional distress and secondary effects of PTSD may be considered as obvious repercussions of abduction experiences but from an Acholi traditional perspective, such continuing psychosocial distress, behaviour, illness among formerly abducted individuals is an indication of *cen* which may require more vigorous cleansing rituals. Since spirituality is placed at the core of life in Acholi, with people interpreting daily social reality through spiritual outlook, such illness/insanity are not seen as coming from within the mind but rather as invasion from the evil/angry spirits. With this perception of psychological and mental illness, Western trauma healing process that targets an inner mental process may not sufficiently address psychological and effects of the war among formerly abducted persons. But also, because cleansing ceremonies in Acholi simply re-affirm cultural values with the primary focus on cultural and clan and not such individual needs, rituals may have less impact. Although the literature and Acholi findings show that the obvious way for former child soldiers to be assisted to manage psychological predicaments largely depends on social and cultural contexts, Western trauma healing ideas should not be completely ignored. They may be needed and helpful in supplementing the ritual cleansing that is considered adequate in this case: there is strong potential for utilising traditional systems and practices to address rehabilitation and reintegration dynamics among children and young people, but complementary initiatives also need to be implemented to enhance the efficacy and, in some cases, adaptability of these institutions (Ochen, 2014:1).

Furthermore, upon successful completion of the right rituals, individuals are supposed to, or should—in principle—be free from any form of stigma (see also Granjo, 2007:382; Heeren, 2004). In Acholi, however, there are double standards with the application of these rituals among most village members. Before field work was carried out, this author assumed that ultimately returnees who have not been cleansed should experience higher levels of stigma but as discussed

³³Interview, CM16; 7/11/2012

in Chapter Six, this is not the case. Regardless of undergoing cleansing ceremony (s), there is a belief in the villages that *all* formerly abducted people are forever carriers of *cen* that could strike at any time. Although cultural cleansing was done to ensure purity and full acceptance in the families and villages, for many of the study participants, this had not been achieved at the time of interviews. Most of them were stigmatised irrespective of having gone through the cleansing or not. This negative treatment of formerly abducted people reaffirms that performance of rituals is largely to fulfil tradition rather than compelling community members not to stigmatise and marginalise such individuals.

To capture different dimensions of successful social reintegration, the study relies on two measures:

- 1) *Acceptance*. Acceptance at family and community level is considered as an important factor for successful reintegration (Annan *et al*, 2006; 2008; Mazurana, 2007; Betancourt, *et al*. 2008; Boothby, *et al*. 2006; Corbin, 2008; McKay & Mazurana, 2004:83). There are two schools of thought related to family and social acceptance of formerly abducted youth: i) that in the initial days of return home, rejection is widespread and persistent; ii) rejection is confined to a minority and reducing with time back home (Annan *et al*. 2010:6). The literature on reintegration in northern Uganda mainly emphasizes widespread family rejection upon return from captivity (see Corbin, 2008; Catholic Relief Services, 2002). The current findings however portray a different picture for most women in our sample. They were warmly welcomed by their families when they first returned home. Annan *et al*. (2006) also observed very high rates of family acceptance in northern Uganda, with only 1% of returnees reporting that their families were unwelcoming (see also Blattman & Annan, 2008). However, although there is an often high level of family acceptance, community acceptance is not as widely spread (see also Annan *et al* 2006). Unlike at the family level, acceptance at community level is achieved after one has re-lived in the community for a considerable period of time. However, it is important to note that initial family acceptance is a big step towards progressive reintegration because it boosts confidence in approaching reintegration in the wider community.

From a long term perspective, not being accepted in the family or/and community level expresses a dominant sense of social distance, rejection and loneliness (Christensen,

2007:77). Lack of complete acceptance becomes the breeding ground for violence and psychosocial problems. In Sierra Leone, a survey of former adults and child soldiers found an association between higher rates of exposure to violence with lower levels of family and community acceptance (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2004; 2007). This hinders long term reintegration process and widens the gap between former child soldiers and people in their immediate surroundings. Because of mistreatment, stigma and marginalisation represent obstacles to further reintegration in the community, thereby forcing them to relocate to other areas (Chapter Six). For such individuals, relocating to new areas meant facing the uphill challenge of reintegration by themselves, without the support of family and village. Therefore, this study treated participant who testified to facing ongoing difficulties in gaining complete acceptance from their families and villages as having failed social reintegration. This measure indicates a successful social reintegration has taken place or is taking place if an individual has no problems relating with family and village members.

- 2) *Stigma*. Stigma is analysed from the participants' perspective as a major hindrance to social reintegration (Chapter Six). For the theoretical understanding of this long term reintegration challenge, the study relies on Erving Goffman's concept of stigma to analyse the term with regard to the former girl abductees' experiences in Acholi contexts. In *Stigma: Notes on the Management of the Spoiled Identity* (1963), Goffman is effective in helping the reader understand, from the standpoint of the stigmatised person, the types of stigma and their consequences when a person encounters other people that are not stigmatised ('normal'). Hence, the study captures how stigma encompasses the women's lives, its forms and manifestation in their alliances with other people. Individuals who have relocated to new environments, or are facing daily scorn, resentment and stigmatisation due to their abduction past, are treated as facing failed reintegration. Participants facing no form of stigmatisation are treated as having received complete acceptance and successful social reintegration.

4.2.2 *Economic Reintegration*

Livelihood is said to be a crucial measure of successful economic reintegration, achieved when former soldiers re-establish sustainable means of earning a living (Kingma, 2001:407; 2000:46;

Sendabo, 2004:66). However, in relation to child soldiers, this definition of successful reintegration is problematic. Many young participants of war are recruited when they are adolescents, with no prior independent livelihoods. When they return to their communities, there are no livelihoods to re-establish, making economic *re*-integration an option for this category of soldiers. 'Economic integration into civil society', as defined by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO, 1995), may be more appropriate for such young ex-soldiers or individuals that are born and have grown up within the armed groups. For present purposes, economic reintegration, particularly for former female abductees that stayed in abduction for a significant period of time, needs to be understood simply as *a societal process of beginning a new life in their communities by forming positive relationships and exploring local resources that can nurture their economic (and social) assimilation.*

With regard to determining economic (and social) reintegration outcomes, some studies, have compared former young soldiers to their civilian peers on how they have fared economically and socially (Taouti-Cherif, 2006; Annan *et al.*, 2006, 2008). However, whether comparison to civilian peers is the best way to assess young soldiers' reintegration success demands further investigation. In the Acholi context, where people are languishing in poverty and impoverishment (Overseas Development Institute, 2010:3), assuming that successful economic reintegration is 'being like anyone else' leaves a lot to be desired. Findings show that formerly abducted people have reduced livelihood resources (Chapter Eight) and, therefore, using peers as a yard stick of their reintegration progress cannot sufficiently explain reintegration as a process and experience. In reality, comparison should be made between reintegrating individuals and groups to determine why certain individual/individuals is/are able to register successful economic reintegration, but others are not. Considering that many of the studies on ex-soldiers' reintegration are carried out in the first months or years of their return home, only a few scholars get the opportunity to assess the impacts of war and to determine why some individuals and not others are able to successfully reintegrate even after a number of years (see Humphreys & Weinstein, 2007; Tajima, 2009). Findings suggest that reintegration progress can be determined by comparing an individual's reintegration experiences when he/she first returned home and life after several years of post-conflict reintegration. Findings also show that one can have positive social outcomes but fail at economic reintegration, or vice versa. It will be more helpful if former child soldiers' reintegration progress is analyzed and measured against their fellow former

soldiers' well-being (reintegration cannot and should not be limited to achieving what non-abducted peers have). The study found that this open ended and developmental process is not just about positive family re-unification, community reinsertion and individual resilience over time. With its outcomes varying according to time and space, reintegration should be analyzed from a long term perspective to find out why some formerly abducted people and not others, are able to register successful reintegration.

To capture dimensions of positive economic reintegration among the participants, the study relies on one measure: meeting their own and their dependents' subsistence needs. A woman who is able to earn a living from agriculture or has secured decent permanent employment, is considered to have experienced 'successful' economic reintegration according to this measure. It is successful because of activity outcomes: what goals the woman is pursuing, the 'living' that results from their economic activities, including reduced poverty, increased incomes, food security, survival, wellbeing, capabilities and less vulnerability. On the other hand, if a participant is unable to depend on or participate in crop growing or does 'odd jobs' for a living, that economic reintegration is unsuccessful (no/limited economic outcomes).

4.3 Concluding Remarks

This Chapter has attempted to discuss themes of successful social and economic reintegration. To determine the factors that could explain why some individuals, and not others, are able to register successful reintegration, we have to go beyond individual/ group experiences. We need to pay close attention the host communities. From the Acholi case study, the chapter has shown that political, economic and social processes change communities. Experiences of war do not only change individuals but their communities as well. This transformation determines how long-term reintegration is understood, conducted and its outcomes measured in such post-conflict areas. In Acholi, extended family and clan relations continuously loosening and weakening, household poverty escalating among other problems make long-term reintegration more challenging. Therefore, in order to understand the reintegration experiences of former girl abductees in such a society, it is necessary to gain an understanding of how they survive and negotiate to engage in such dynamic and changing post conflict situations. The central themes in the lives of the participants, including life in captivity, stigma, marriage and livelihoods are the subject of discussion in the next chapters.

CHAPTER FIVE

ABDUCTION AND LIFE IN CAPTIVITY

This chapter explores the experience of captivity of study participants as a process of socialisation or transformation. As a result of their association with the LRA, their roles and identities were changed from that of children to abductees/recruits. Also, this association came with a stigmatising identity of rebels. The different sections of the chapter are therefore organised according to these different phases of socialisation/transformation, including the actual abduction, post-abduction, initiation ceremonies, military training and deployment for rebel activities, all of which are discussed as phases of this process. Further, the chapter discusses forced marriage and pregnancy in the context(s) of the LRA. The findings support the argument that, while soldiering in captivity, girls occupy multiple roles including fighter, helper, logistician, medical personnel, slave and domestic labourer, mother, and wife, among others (see McKay & Mazurana, 2004:109; Amnesty International, 2001; Coalition to End the Use of Child Soldiers, 2001; Mazurana *et al.*, 2002). The chapter examines the wife and mother identities the participants found themselves placed into, how they related to their military identities, and how these identities influenced their experiences (behaviour, decisions, feelings and emotions) and tied them to the armed group. Finally, the chapter maintains that taking on new multiple and stigmatising identities (rebel, forced mother/wife) did not mean girls forgot about their desired, accepted social identities as formed in their childhoods. Retaining knowledge of what they were before abduction, and maintaining hope that one day they would redeem it, became a motivation to survive in captivity and eventually to escape it.

5.1 Becoming a Rebel

5.1.1 Abduction

As the case of Catherine³⁴ shows clearly (Table 5.1), the circumstances of abduction remain an important part of the experience of captivity, with many respondents remembering their age and the date, time and exact location at which they were forced to leave their families behind. The abduction details are imprinted in their memories, marking the day they were forced to end the life they knew. Such small details are significant for the participants because they help them find their place/position in this inconceivable experience. With these details, the women are able to make out the genesis of their struggle for adaptation to the stigmatised identity of ‘rebel’.

³⁴ Interview, CM 25, 7th November, 2012, Kitgum, Omiya-nyima Sub County. In this case study, the author, as in all subsequent case studies has tried to repeat the participant’s words as verbatim as possible in a bid to convey both their voice and words.

Table 5.1: Abduction and life in Captivity— Catherine’s Story

In 1993, at the age of 14, Catherine was abducted from her parents’ home in Omiyanyima, Sub County. She grew up in an extended family, with many siblings. Like most households in rural Acholi, her family depended on peasant farming. Her father was predominantly a peasant farmer who grew beans, maize, ground nuts for consumption and cash. In addition to farming, her housewife mother brewed *waragi* (local gin) that she sold to earn some income as well. Due to lack of finances, Catherine had dropped out of school before she could complete primary four.

On the fateful day, around 7:00am, Catherine was abducted by the LRA’s fighters. It was a Sunday, towards the end of the month of August. From her family two of them were abducted on that day, Catherine and her younger step sister named Suzan (her family called her Suu and she is suspected to have died in captivity). On the day of their abduction, along with other abductees, they walked through the thick bushes of Omiyanyima and connected to Wol Sub County, where they camped for some days, waiting for other abductors to catch up with them. When the abductors were ready to proceed, abductees were separated in different groups. Catherine and her step-sister ended up in different groups and she never saw her sister again.

Catherine’s group proceeded to Patongo Sub County where they stayed for a couple of weeks. During the days they spent in Patongo, all recruitees’ foreheads, chest, feet and the back of the palms on both sides of the hands were anointed using oil squeezed from Shea Nut butter trees. In October, they left Patongo and headed straight for Sudan where Catherine stayed in one of the LRA’s bases located in Aruu.

At first, for a period of one month, she lived with a Commander named Onen Unita. Her assignment in Onen’s household included harvesting, chopping into pieces and drying *Okra* (leafy vegetables) which Onen had grown in his courtyard. She also helped with domestic chores. Catherine was later handpicked by another high ranking officer, Commander Charles Kapere to undergo some elementary military training. At the age of 14, Catherine was also considered old enough for marriage and child bearing. Commander Kapere who was also Kony’s escort, became her husband. He was an Acholi himself and had four wives. Catherine had one kid with Kapere. The boy was named Nono Charles: I had never heard of such a name Nono until when he gave it to my boy. I still don’t know the meaning of that name. I thought he named the boy Nono because he got me for free as a wife just like he did to others. But he told me that he named the kid after his uncle who was called Nono.’ In 2003, after 10 years in captivity, Kapere arranged for Catherine’s escape, with their son. She later learnt from other escapees that Kapere had been killed in the fighting with the UPDF. In 2005, after two years of being home, she got married to another man. At the time of our interview, 26 years old Catherine was a mother of four children.

On the day of abduction, the participants encountered the reality of their life for the coming days, months or years in captivity: being separated from their families, constant attacks from the national army or other militias, death, suffering and trauma (see also Temmerman, 2001; Stavrou, 2004; Veale & Stavrou, 2003). Most participants talked about horrifying battle confrontations between the LRA fighters and the Ugandan army on the day of abduction and during their immediate post-abduction. These battles were an indication that they were no longer ordinary Acholi girls but enemies of the state. Pursued by the UPDF wherever they went, the civilians (the LRA, in their derogative manners referred to the newly abducted as civilians) had to find ways of surviving the first day(s) of abduction, including collaborating with their abductors and learning survival and protection skills. Nevertheless, as amateurs in the jungle, many still lost their lives while others received serious injuries. Meralin's first day in the world of the LRA is informative:

When we got to Palabek, we encountered an ambush set by the government soldiers. They started shooting us from the ground and there was also a helicopter gunship hovering over us. They fired at us and that helicopter was killing many people. Those who entered nearby houses, they were bombed and burned inside them. I also got an injury, I was shot in the stomach and when I saw it [the injury], and I plunged down and started crying. Then the commander of the group I was in told his escort not let me escape. The escort held my hand and began running with me. When fighting stopped, UPDF carried their wounded and dead in their helicopter while the rest of the LRA fighters and abductees continued with their journey to Sudan.³⁵

Even after receiving such grave injuries, they were forced to proceed with the journey: on the day I was abducted, it was around midnight; we walked and fought the enemies [UPDF]. In the morning, I realized I was shot in the thigh. There was no food or water, nothing to survive on. With my injury, the rebels were still forcing me to walk and carry heavy luggage...³⁶

The way they were unexpectedly and brutally snatched from their families was the same way they had to adapt to the reality of the armed group—fighting for survival. The sight and presence of the fierce rebels that some of the participants had heard of back in the villages would have indicated entering a new and risky military environment where old rules and perspectives did not apply any more. Since resistance was likely to lead to torture and even death, the abductees had to promptly pick survival skills by creating personal *identities* befitting them before their

³⁵Interview CM37, Kitgum town

³⁶ Interview, CM 30, Omiyanyima

abductors. Identity is the set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant in society, member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person' (Burke & Stets, 2009). In social identity theory, Hogg and Abrams (1988) argue that social identity is a person's knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category or group. A social group is a category of individuals with a common social identification or a set of people who view themselves as members of the same social group. In this case, a rebel group like the LRA can be seen as a social group where members have a particular social identity (being like others in the group, and seeing things from the group's perspective). When the participants were forced to join the armed group, their sense of who they were based on the social group they subscribed to (children/adolescents/teenagers) changed to another social identity of female abductees/recruits'. They became part of the armed group, although they continued to resist it and its works. Adapting to its characteristics and means of survival was a crucial step to stay alive on the day of abduction, on the journey to Sudan (the LRA's then base) and life in captivity. The days that followed their abduction were significant turning points for the participants and, fundamentally, a first step into their new social identities and roles.

5.1.2 Being taken to the bush': *The Journey to Sudan*

The participants referred to their immediate post-abduction experience as being taken to the bush' and the time spent in captivity as life in the bush' (see also Coulter, 2009). Their moment of clarity regarding their new environment (the bush) and belonging' came in the few days that followed the abduction, with every passing day confirming their being taken to the bush' and raising the spectre of permanent stay with the *olum-olum* (people of the bush'). Although in Acholi, *olum* means *grass*, it also means bush': an unsafe, fearful and mysterious place that should not be visited without good reason. People who stay in the bush' are considered either dangerous or mentally unstable. This shows the tension between bush' and village' spaces. Aware that the bush' is a place where wild animals, criminals and evil spirits reside, the longer girls stayed there; the more their identity was forcefully becoming changed to that of *olum-olum* (people of the bush'/rebels'), an identity that was *disgraceful* in the eyes of the people back home. In this regard, length of abduction is irrelevant, because any form of association with the *olum-olum*, however short, was/is considered horrendous by an individual and society.

Apart from the continuous battle, confrontations and attacks, stories reveal further post-abduction experiences the participants endured, including trekking for days without resting and undergoing intense torture and suffering. They particularly described the journey to Sudan as the most daunting and difficult part of their initial life in captivity, comprising extreme suffering and survival. It involved weeks of trekking in the bush, going for days without food and/or water while carrying heavy loads of looted materials on their heads and backs (see also Temmerman, 2001). For the majority like Catherine (Table 5.1), the journey to Sudan took weeks; and for others, months. However, for those that were abducted from areas bordering Sudan, or who were kidnapped when the rebels were heading to Sudan, the journey did not last as long:

I was abducted at around 12:00am. We moved and joined up with a bigger group at around 2:00am. We were abducted by about 6 rebels. After meeting up with a bigger group, they prepared food and people ate. We then left that place at around 4:00pm and we walked until midnight. We got to another place where they started cooking and that is where we slept. We then resumed moving the following day, heading to Sudan. They abducted us when they were heading back to Sudan. The journey to the Uganda-Sudan border took us three days and nights. It took us more than two days and nights longer to reach their base inside Sudan. On our way there, people died because whoever could not walk anymore, mainly because the person had a swollen leg would be killed.³⁷

Forcing abductees to walk long distances while carrying heavy loads was a training strategy the LRA commanders exploited (Dolan, 2009). Traversing the remote bushy areas of northern Uganda toughened and introduced abductees to the crafts of surviving the harsh conditions of ‘life in the bush’.

However, due to their young age, walking long stretches for days with heavy loads eventually wore many of them down. Complaining about heavy loads, swollen legs, or showing any signs of weakness called for death or beatings for slowing the convoy. For example, Stella, abducted at the age of 15, narrated how a young boy in her unit was killed following his exhaustion and deteriorating health as they journeyed to Sudan:

...If they sensed that you were fearful or weak, they would kill you, for example one young boy who said he was tired and begged to rest. He thought they were going to leave him there to rest but instead they hit his head and they told him; ‘now you rest here.’ They asked us all to line up and touch the dead boy’s body while saying; ‘pretence does

³⁷ Interview, CM09

not help/work'. Then after that, they said everyone should put in effort to walk because if you pretend then you will be killed like this boy...³⁸

Our Journey to Sudan began on January 31st 1999 but I was only able to reach there on February 9th while the rest of the group had reached a day before [February 8th]. I was left behind because I was too weak to move anymore. I was battered and left for dead. We had spent 7 days without food and I think I lost consciousness and only regained it later, maybe because of the cold at night. I could not walk any longer but the next morning, I began crawling on my knees and stomach. I followed the track the group had taken to locate them. I had crawled for some hours when I suddenly came across an elderly fighter by the bank of the stream with his wife. When he saw me crawling to find the other group members, he was gripped with sympathy and he carried me to their base.³⁹

The Survey of War Affected Youth (SWAY) found that, unlike abducted females, males were more likely to experience acts of violence associated with combat, and witness killings or the burning of houses with people inside (Annan *et al.*, 2008:28). However, the interviews and wider literature show that both boys and girls experienced extreme levels of violence (see Annan *et al.*, 2011:9). Many participants reported perpetrating violence, including killing their peers and civilians, or witnessing a murder in some traumatising fashion:

When we came to Uganda for the first time to fight, some of us tried to escape but we were captured on the way. The rebels decided to kill all of us. They first beat us. I was beaten over 300 strokes and battered six times with a panga on my back. All the other people were also beaten like that. Then Kony sent a message to his commanders that the person who brought the idea of escaping should be killed, instead of them killing us all. And one commander shouted, -You must all kill that woman!" They gave us machetes like pangas to kill the woman. Because of their orders and fear, we had to kill her. After killing her, they told us to raise her body upright. We raised her body up but of course it could not stand. And they said, If she does not want to stand, then you tie her on the tree and leave her there', which we did.⁴⁰

Violence was an instrument of control in the LRA, and even short periods of abduction involved exposure to significant brutality (see also Annan *et al.*, 2006). From early experiences with the LRA, we identify how the armed group instilled fear into the new abductees by forcing them to witness acts of extreme violence or to take part in such acts (see also Temmerman, 2001; Cook, 2007; Stavrou *et al.*, 2000). Such brutalising strategies and experiences have been widely

³⁸Interview, CM7, Labong Amida, 11/10/2012

³⁹ Interview, CM 28, Omiyanyima, 7/11/2012

⁴⁰ Interview, CM15 Omiya-Anyima, 5/11/2012

reported in other African armed groups, for example in Liberia and Sierra Leone (see Ellis, 1997; Peters & Richards, 1999).

Following these initial brutal experiences with armed groups, it is argued that girls (and boys) go on to view killing and blood as normal and as part of survival tactics (see Denov & Maclure, 2005). However true this may be, the evidence from Acholi shows that even when girls eventually see killing as normal or as the only way to survive, girls are aware of the implications of such acts that reinforce their stigma and guilt of having killed or witnessed a murder. For example, when one of them was killed, tortured or left behind to die, the experience reconfirmed the bad, terrifying circumstances the participants now lived in. They also became concerned about the evil associated with killing, particularly the possibility of *cen* (evil spirit of the dead) haunting them in future (Chapter 3).

The LRA leaders also instilled fear into the abductees through the vicious acts including heavy caning, starvation, threats, and torture. This was done as a way of transforming them from civilians to soldiers. This process introduced the abductees to excruciating pain and many of them lost their lives as a consequence: thus, when we got to Ogili Mountain, they severely beat us with a machete saying they were turning us into soldiers. They trickled a burning jerry-can on our backs and when we were close to River Aswa in Gulu district, my brother died two days later from that injury....⁴¹; or, similarly, I was abducted with my young sister. We stayed together for only one day and they separated us. I was so terrified and couldn't eat for days. All I wanted so much was to go back home. Because of not eating their food, I was stabbed in the arm with a machete/knife. I had to start eating but I suffered from serious diarrhoea and almost died.⁴² This kind of brutality by the commanders in the early days of life in captivity was a deliberate attempt to instil fear into the abductees and scare them out of attempting to escape, so that the present terror overcame the previous experience and memories (see also HRW, March and July, 2003).

When armed commanders are creating effective child soldiers, they do it by breaking them down through brainwashing, breaking their self-esteem and destroying bonds to family and communities (Fujio, 2007). In *Brainwashing: The science of thought control*, Taylor (2006:97)

⁴¹ Interview, CM23 Omiya-Anyima, 7/11/2012

⁴² Interview, CM01, Amida sub county

writes that brain washing aims to achieve behavioural change, but behavioural change is secondary: its main goal is to change the thoughts of its victims to fit its preferred ideology.‘ Following this brainwashing phase, the abductees started acting as though their old life meant nothing to them and they were willing‘ to work and promote the ideology of their captors. As part of the brainwashing process, abductees were also told that if they escaped, government soldiers and/or people in the society would kill them (see also HRW, March and July, 2003). Therefore, they had only one option to survive: abiding by the rules of the armed group, which was now their new family and society. The participants found themselves doing whatever they could so as not to jeopardise their relationship with the *olum-olum*, even if that meant committing atrocities and participating in violent operations as a sign of their loyalty to the agenda of the group.

5.1.3. *Initiation /Purification Ceremonies*

The third phase of the role and identity transformation process was going through the armed group’s elaborate initiation rites. The study found that the LRA took the initiation ceremonies seriously and all the civilians‘ had to be cleansed. Until then, they were not to dine with, sit among or cook for the LRA members. Almost all the participants (97%) went through these mandatory cleansing ceremonies. Mainly because of fear, there were no cases of civilians‘ refusing to go through the initiation rites. Whereas the wider transformation process started with abduction and continued for the duration of the time in captivity, formal‘ initiation took place after arrival in permanent LRA camps in Sudan. For the abductees like Catherine (Table 5.1) who went through it before getting to Sudan, commanders (supervisors for the rites) only smeared the *yard oil* on their limbs in a cross sign. At the start of a formal‘ ceremony, the civilians‘ were ordered, in most cases by the LRA leader, Joseph Kony, to an assembly in the courtyard, a big open ground they referred to as a *yard*. Camp commanders (for military rankings in the LRA, see Cakaj, 2010) were also to assemble in a manner that formed a circle around the civilians‘. Abductees were forced to strip to the waist while they sang songs. The first step of the rite was known as *camoflash* (camouflage‘), in which marks of the cross were painted on the civilian‘ bodies using some white liquid which according to the informants was made from ash mixed with local herbs. The next step involved anointing their foreheads, chest (heart region), feet and hands using *moo yaa* (shea-butter oil, or *yard oil* as it was known in LRA camps). They were then made to drink water collected from a swamp containing some red substances, locally

known as *pala* (clay from swamps, usually used for decoration in Acholi culture), mixed with other herbs unknown to the participants. This solution was called *combined* and the initiates were told it would give them courage and make them brave in confronting *all* the forthcoming challenges. The ceremony was concluded with the commanders sprinkling *holy* water on the *civilians*. Sprinkling *holy* water can be related to the Christian rite of baptism in which the person is anointed with *holy* water to indicate acceptance into the community of Christians. Their clothes being considered *unclean*, replacement clothing was distributed and initiates were instructed not to look back while walking to their accommodations. They were not allowed to bathe or engage in sexual activity and were kept in isolation for the entire duration of the initiation period. The initiation ceremonies were similar across all the LRA camps. The rite lasted between one to four days depending on the camp commanders, who also decided who had successfully completed the rites and could be *accepted* as full members of the group or community. It is not clear what happened to *civilians* whose initiation rites were not successful.

These rites were psychologically effective because they confirmed an *agreement/contract* between the abductees and their abductors, forcing the former to surrender and be loyal to the latter's cause. The rites signified acceptance into the armed group, formally attaching or bonding the abductees to the rebel group. The *purified* individuals had survived the day of abduction and journey to Sudan, and now, in their new home, they were expected to act and behave according to the rules and regulations of the new community.

As in other African armed groups (see Denov&Maclure, 2005), these rites in the LRA were done for solidarity and submission purposes. The rituals were an extension of brainwashing: the abductees were made to believe that the ceremony cleansed all the evil—particularly witchcraft connections—they had carried from their homes; that following successful completion of the rites, they would be loyal and not think of escaping; and if they did escape, they would be caught. The rites also reinforced the new identity of *olum*—they were now ambassadors of the LRA. As confirmed members, they had to be loyal promoters of LRA ideology, rules and codes, with transgressions being punishable by death. Additionally, completion of rituals granted abductees privileges that came with full membership of the group. Along with longer established members, they could proceed with military training and other operations (fighting, looting and abducting) and get married. Since new abductees seemed to join the LRA camps regularly, the

rituals accorded earlier abductees a higher status compared to that of civilians (new abductees) who were not yet accorded privileges.

5.1.4 Girls as Actors: Military Training and Deployment for Work

Research shows that many girls abducted by armed forces in African countries receive military training (see Stavrou, 2004:43; Save the Children, 2005; UNICEF, 2005; McKay&Mazurana, 2004:74; Denov&Maclure, 2005). Although the LRA had many camps in different parts of Sudan, their main camps were Nisitu and Jabelene, located near Juba Town. These areas were also their main military training wings. This is where Catherine (Table 5.1) and other participants (88%) received their formal military training. The participants who did not receive any form of military training had either escaped before they got to Sudan, were already pregnant by the time they got to Sudan, or were abducted as mothers.

After the initiation ceremonies, girls, like boys, underwent basic military training on how to operate the guns, including target shooting, dismantling, cleaning and re-assembling the machine and naming its different parts. They were taught how to loot, carry luggage, check for enemy movements (while on patrol), stage an ambush or defend themselves if they were caught in one, and to spy on the enemy. The military training period ranged from two weeks to six months depending on the camp's commander. The training starting at four in the morning and the trainees came back to the camps for lunch at 13:00, then resumed at 14:00 and finished for the day at 19:00. Scholars who have focused on girl soldiers, such as Denov&Maclure (2005), present a good case regarding the depth, content and quality of physical and technical military training girls receive in armed groups: an intense, fearful and anxious experience for them. The participants talked about the exhausting marches and parades, standing under the sun for hours, and constant beatings during training that left them worn out. Military training not only enhanced their fighting and survival skills, it affirmed their fighting identity and role. At the end of the course, most of them were given a gun, though not all were deployed or became fighters (see also McKay &Mazurana, 2004:57).

Although equipped with these basic military skills, girls were expected to learn on the job as they worked alongside the more experienced members of the group. In the LRA, girls assumed ready to fight were immediately deployed for front-line combat and looting operations in Uganda and Sudan. Of the women in the sample, 93% reported that girls aged 13 and above were deployed in

front-line combat roles alongside boys and men, and 40% of the participants were actively involved in mainstream fighting. Selection to return to Uganda for battle was done by commanders along with—for married girls—their husbands. Husbands decided which of their wives were to be deployed for any military work: ‘...I was married to an old man, 56 years old ... if I said no to sex, he sent me to fight on the frontline and if there was no operation, he put me on standby’, among the boys where we slept in the bush, on guard duty and laying ambushes’.⁴³

From the military training and deployment for work narratives, the study identifies three broad categories of females in the LRA: active fighters, aiders (carrying out supportive tasks) and camp runners (those who stayed in camps):

Active fighters

Most active female fighters in the LRA first returned to Uganda as reserve soldiers. However, many of them ended up engaging in rebel activities of attacking villages, abducting adolescents and looting, among others. Girls who showed courage and interest during military training and operations gained more trust and attention from *lupwony* (translated as teacher, this is how the senior officers and commanders were addressed.) In the long run, such girls were often deployed for front-line combat roles. Some went on to work closely with their *lupwony*, as escorts or heading their own small units. Prossy’s experience shows the possibility of girls progressing through the ranks. Abducted at the age of 10 for 11 years, she went on to progress from *ting-ting* (servant) to higher status, heading a unit: ‘... by the time I exited the armed group; I was a corporal, heading a squad of eleven soldiers. I was given that rank following my good performance in the frontline combat roles...’⁴⁴ Some girls in the LRA grew to hold command positions such as captains, lieutenants and corporals (see also McKay & Mazurana, 2004:57) and have been described as the brightest and bravest in battle (Finnstrom, 2008:191). Girls taking on significant positions in armed groups is not new; after spending years with their recruiters, they become capable, enthusiastic and fierce fighters who terrorise and abduct civilians (see Denov & Maclure, 2005; HRW, 2004:29; Richards, 2005:89; Mazurana & Carlson, 2004:14; MacKenzie, 2009a:206).

⁴³Interview, CM55, Laroo division, Gulu district, 5/2/2013

⁴⁴Interview, CM55

Aiders

This category of females in the LRA moved with the fighters as aiders, performing support tasks including fetching firewood and water, preparing food, carrying looted materials, moving weapons and ammunition, and nursing the sick and injured, among others. The major role here was to ensure that the fighters were taken care of. However, while these girls mainly carried out supportive roles, they still had to carry guns, and losing them called for serious punishment: Acan was a *nec* (‘_nurse or health personnel’), and she still carried her gun as she executed her role: ‘_when we reached the time for fighting, the commander said I was young but a fast learner and could be good at another role, like a nurse. From there and then, I began moving with them, nursing injured people. I still carried the gun but did not fight.’⁴⁵ They were told guns would make them brave and strong hearted: ‘_females carried firearms for defensive more often than offensive use’ (Annan *et al.*, 2011:9). From the interviews, it is hard to determine whether holding a gun created any sense of security for girls in the LRA, but in other African contexts holding a gun has been found to be a source of power for girls (see Denov&Maclure, 2005).

Camp Runners

Last but not the least, another category of females in the LRA included those who remained behind running the camps. The LRA leaders relied on this category of girls and young women to keep the camps functioning and provide a labour force for domestic work and for transporting supplies (see also McKay & Mazurana, 2004:57, 109; Temmerman, 2001; Carlson & Mazurana, 2008:14–15; Annan *et al.*, 2011). In her analysis of systematic rape and sexual abuse of women during armed conflict in Africa, Turshen (2001:61) argues that ‘_controlling women’s productive labour is one of the gains from rape and abduction in civil conflicts.’ This was reflected in the abduction strategies of the LRA. In addition to sexual and domestic services, the armed group relied on girls and women to provide an agricultural labour force: weeding, harvesting and transporting the food to the camps, among other activities. Even when food was looted or provided by the locals, preparation tasks of peeling, drying, cleaning, pounding and cooking were explicitly within this category of work. This was done alongside other daily tasks in the

⁴⁵Interview, CM48, Lokung, 12/12/2012

camps: child rearing, taking care of their husbands’, and participating in looting sprees in Sudan.

For all these categories, military training and deployment for various operations, of whatever nature, concluded the process of becoming a rebel’. Deployment helped girls to progress from being mere members of the LRA to contributors as fighters, abductors, looters, aiders and home-makers. Although girls who carried out supportive roles did not participate in front line fighting or undertake important military operations like spying or setting ambushes, their shared experiences with young soldiers and ability to execute their assigned roles diligently cannot and should not be overlooked. Through their supportive roles, they were subjected to a great deal of rough treatment. To ensure the fighters were fed and taken care of, girls carried their heavy loads wherever they went. Girls also risked their lives carrying cooking stoves while food was being prepared on them: ...they would put sand in a washing basin, then a stove was placed in and then you carry the basin with food cooking on it.⁴⁶ Such activities left some of them with stigmatising marks of a burnt skull or skin, or chest complaints and chronic headaches that they continue to live with as reminders of their life in captivity.

McKay & Mazurana (2004) write that domestic roles including cooking, laundering, fetching firewood and water, and taking care of children are, in the context of armed groups, sidelined and viewed as insignificant. The service (apart from sexual) offered by the girls to the LRA is not often recognised as their experiences are analysed. However, it is evident that girls—young, energetic and resilient—were invaluable to the very survival of the LRA. Therefore, describing abducted girls simply as a vulnerable group associated/involved with armed groups’ limits clear understanding of functional work-related notions of logistics, health corps, combat and service support. Not specifically labelling their work (combat and non-combat) extends gender discrimination on the basis of division of labour to the armed groups (Stavrou, 2005a). Girls carry out critical work that is essential for the survival of these armed groups. Their work should not be simply considered a natural extension of their domestic responsibilities (that is, considered unworthy’ and not significant enough). These girls are courageous and hardworking, and *all* the work they do should be appreciated and recognised. Therefore, taking their roles as an integral

⁴⁶ Interview, CM30, Kitgum town

part of the conflict, and focusing on their roles and how they survive warfare, will reveal the centrality of the militarisation of girls in fuelling and supporting armed conflicts.

5.2 ‘Forced Marriage’ as a Cohesion Strategy

McKay & Mazurana (2004:58) note that ‘nearly all abducted girls are raped and girls associated with fighting forces almost universally report sexual violence.’ Almost all the participants in this study reported one type of sexual violence—forced marriage (see Neha, 2008). Unlike in other African armed groups where gang rapes and sex slavery are reported to be common (see, for example, Coulter, 2009:126; Denov & Maclure, 2005), gang rapes were not reported in the interviews (see also Kramer, 2012). Instead, as Catherine’s story (Table 5.1) tells, girls were subjected to early forced marriage and pregnancies with one fighter, and when he died on the battlefield or through natural causes, she was transferred to another man.

The analysis of the system and practice of forced marriage in the context of the LRA remains sketchy in the literature. One perspective is that the armed group’s forced marriage system evoked the historical Acholi marriage tradition (Allen & Schomerus, 2006). The authors argue that ‘marriage by capture’ is not new in this region, where ‘girls are mostly taken to become ‘wives’ in much the same way as chiefs and war leaders in the past ... In taking young women as ‘wives’, the LRA has systematically manipulated and corrupted certain existing conventions and moral norms.’ However true this argument may be, Allen and Schomerus overlook the fact that the marriage institution in this region has changed and continues gradually to change from what it was 20–50 years ago (Chapter 7). Although Acholi culture still accords pride to marriages arranged through courtship and payment of bride price (customary marriage), modernity has produced alternatives including religious unions, cohabitation, elopement and single parenthood—but not ‘marriage by capture’.

The other viewpoint is proposed by Carlson & Mazurana (2008), who extensively describe the character of forced marriage within the LRA. They argue that the practice endured because it was systematised by the group’s leadership with the aim of increasing their effectiveness. The current study draws from this argument and discusses how forcibly marrying off girls to older men/commanders was a strategy for the top leadership to control girls (and the fighters) and induce unity in the armed group. Girls were a prize or inducement to stabilise male fighters, avoid them raping civilians or otherwise engaging in rape outside marriage, and maintain their

loyalty (focus) with the army (see also Kramer, 2012). Adult females were seen as potential carriers of sexual diseases, and thus were not distributed as wives to the fighters. Betty, abducted at the age of 30, explains that: their [LRA] interest was on the young girls because they did not have any sexual infections. But for us who were abducted when we were mothers, we did not get much attention from the fighters.⁴⁷

Hypothetically, unlike gang rape and rape outside of these marriages, rape within marriages seemed to have a social and ethical validity within the armed group, and marriage offered stability. In not permitting gang rape and rape outside marriage (adultery), the leadership was exerting control over all fighters and ensuring they respected Acholi marriage norms (even when they broke most of them). Writing about the marriage system in the LRA, Annan *et al.* (Aug 2009:12) note that abduction and forced marriages, combined with prohibitions on sex out of marriage, [were] effective tools for creating social cohesion and maintaining control when material resources [were] low.⁴ Gang rape and loose relationships were seen as a threat to this cohesion and the group's effectiveness. Thus, forced marriage and prohibiting sex outside marriage were promoted as antidotes to this threat.

Research shows that girls in armed groups face a higher risk of being infected with sexually transmitted diseases (see McKay & Mazurana, 2004:63), but this seems not to have been the case with the LRA. Through their strict codes of marriage, the leaders avoided practical complications like spread of sexually transmitted diseases. The participants returned home without HIV/Aids infections. The study did come across one confirmed case of HIV. Betty, whom we met earlier, reunited with her polygamous husband after two years in captivity. Three months before our interview, she had tested HIV positive and started on antiretroviral drugs.

This is the strict system Catherine (Table 5.1) and other newly abducted girls found themselves in when they reached Sudan. Since rape in these marriages occupied a big part of their daily lives while in captivity, it is hard to ignore this experience. Besides, doing so reinforces the representation of rape victims as faceless victims of war⁴ (Enloe, 2000:108). Hence, the chapter analyses this experience and life in captivity in terms of survivors' stories, and not merely stories of victims of sexual violence. Their stories present unimaginable experiences borne by girls who

⁴⁷Interview, CM46, Lokung, 14/12/2012

endured and survived to narrate them. The chapter concerns the journey and experience of becoming a ‘wife’ in the context of an armed group, including how younger girls were prepared for marriage, the manner of girls' distribution to men and the composition of these unions.

5.2.1 *‘Little’ Girls in Military Service*

In the contexts of the LRA, female age mattered in that, upon reaching the camps in Sudan, the female ‘civilians’ were divided into three groups: prepubescent girls, adolescent girls and adult women. Women in these categories experienced the journey to marriage and becoming a wife differently, as discussed below.

After successful completion of initiation ceremonies, *anyira-matino* (‘little girls’, less than 13 years)—commonly referred to as *ting ting* (servants) in the camps—were randomly distributed among commanders as their subjects. Alternatively, a little girl was attached to *mego* (mother/senior woman) that had been with the group for a significant period of time to act as her caretaker/nanny. When they got to Sudan, many of the participants first acted as *ting ting*. Their roles were to serve as house helpers: babysitting, farming, and carrying out domestic chores including fetching water, laundry, and preparing food, among others.

At this stage of their journey, in commanders’ homes and with older women, their experience was characterized by suffering, mistreatment and hard labour from older females and ordinary soldiers. Unlike older girls (aged 13 and above), the *ting ting* had commanders’ protection and were not heavily punished in the camps or deployed for fighting or looting operations. However, in the absence of the commanders and senior officers, they underwent various forms of violation and suffering at the hands of the commanders’ wives, older women and other ordinary soldiers. Being the lowest in the LRA structure, *ting ting* worked continuously and were subjected to hard labour, exploitation and assault: ‘when commanders sent older people for rebel activities and they [commanders] were also away; their wives assaulted us [*ting-ting*] so much, and they warned us not to report it to their husbands...,’⁴⁸ (see also Annan *et al.*, 2010:10; Carlson & Mazurana, 2008:21). Even those who did not serve as domestic *ting ting* had their share of suffering. As an escort to a female commander, Josephine carried her luggage and ran her errands: ‘working with females in high ranks was not easy because they were bad and very rude.

⁴⁸Interview, CM18, Omiya Anyima, 8/11/2012

They did not even smile with you. They did not want you to answer them back. If they called you, you should respond by saying ‘yes mother/mummy’ and yet she was not even your mother.’⁴⁹

The participants reported that the commanders’ wives mistreated the *ting ting* in their households because the latter were seen as competitors, who could snatch the former’s husbands (see also McKay & Mazurana, 2004:93). Without the favour and protection of their husbands, the commanders’ wives would be exposed to more suffering in the camps and during military operations. As in other armed African groups where the commanders’ wives (and females in high ranking positions) took charge of the camps (see McKay & Mazurana, 2004:93; Mazurana & Carlson, 2004:14; Rosen, 2005:70; MacKenzie, 2009a:206), such females in the LRA controlled and manipulated younger girls (and boys) to do as they pleased. Since they knowingly committed a high level of violence on others, they cannot be dismissed simply as victims; but were perpetrators of violence. Although girls’ war experiences are increasingly being documented, the distinctions in girls’ and women’s war experiences are not yet well understood (McKay, 2006). The added difficulties and ill-treatment faced by younger girls at the hands of older females may influence their decisions as they grow up in armed groups. However, how this plays out remains unclear.

5.2.2 *Distribution of Girls to Men*

Findings and literature show that because of their varying ages, girls were married off at different times and through different methods. When a *ting ting* became of age (started menstrual cycle), she was considered a woman, ready for marriage and bearing children. This regulation was often violated in some camps where girls were married off as young as eleven, but in most cases, at 13 and above, a girl was attached to a man as her husband. Studies link sexual violence and patriarchy, explaining that this abuse confronted by girls during armed conflicts can be viewed as a reflection of peacetime attitudes (see Viseur-Sellers, 1999). To some extent, LRA leaders seemed to be products of a culture that underlines patriarchal values—that females exist for the sexual fulfilment of males (Eno, 2002:6). The LRA leaders clearly extended a custom of marriageable age to their camps. Customarily, a girl becomes marriageable in her early adolescent years (12–16) (Girling, 1960:27, 68). The LRA leaders distributed the younger girls

⁴⁹Interview, CM20, Omiya Anyima, 8/11/2012

to commanders' and older women's households to guide and help them come of age and prepare them to become homemakers. Upon a girl's first menstruation, she was forcefully removed from her caretaker/nanny, who had absolutely no say over how the girl should be treated. Girls were married off to usually older men (see also Carlson & Mazurana, 2008). In cases when a *ting ting* came of age while in a commander's house, it was up to the commander to decide what to do with her; either to take her for himself or, in rare cases, to give her to another man, probably his escort.

If prepubescent girls were kept as *ting ting* and given out as wives later, older adolescent girls like Catherine (Table 5.1) were married off upon reaching the LRA camps, after the initiation rites. The narratives show that the most common ways of distributing girls to men followed two systematic procedures. In one instance, girls were gathered in the *yard*, in a line or circle, and men picked their wives according to their rank, with commanders going first. Carlson & Mazurana (2008:20) note that commanders chose females as wives based on the girls' beauty and education levels. In the current study, physical appearance was reported as a determining factor for marriage selection, but education was not. When commanders identified a girl as unattractive (with any sort of deformity), the abductor was quizzed on why such a girl was recruited. Because no woman was allowed to stay in the camps unmarried, if a girl was rejected by all men, she was freed to return home. It was only at this stage that a man could reject a girl as his wife, not after sleeping with her. The second distribution method included soldiers collecting their military uniforms in one spot. Girls were ordered to pick a uniform each, one at a time. The girl became the wife of the fighter whose uniform she picked (see also Carlson & Mazurana, 2008).

The majority (82 per cent) of the participants in this study were forcibly given out as wives through the above mentioned methods. A further 8 per cent were courted by young men and willingly got married. Although the majority of girls were forcibly given out to men and others were given a choice to pair with men as couples, this was all *rape*. Because it was difficult to live a single life in captivity, pairing with a man cannot be seen as having been a choice either, but only as a way of surviving.

The remaining 10 per cent of the participants were never married, either because they were abducted as adults and mothers or turned into full-time fighters. Although many girls were turned into servants and wives when they arrived in Sudan, some of the abducted girls

(particularly between the ages of 12 and 17) were purposely selected to join active fighting. Such girls skipped the *ting ting* and marriage distribution phases and were confined to the full time fighters' group that was often deployed back in Uganda:

When I reached Sudan, I was picked and taken for training. We were 29 young girls among about 90 men that were selected for military training to become full time soldiers...After training, I later started full time fighting ... the first four ambushes; we carried it on the UPDF and not the civilians ... I was not given out to any man until I returned home.⁵⁰

5.2.3 Marriage Compositions and Experience in the LRA

Although these marriages were/are not recognised by customary law in Acholi and Uganda, they were designed and carried out to look like 'proper' marriages as practised in Acholi. They had the 'traditional characteristics of shared domicile, bearing of children, domestic responsibilities, exclusivity and sex' (Carlson & Mazurana, 2008:7, 14–15). As in normal society, marriage was/is the basic central unit in the LRA where strict regulations and power structures existed to regulate how women related to men—through control of sexual behaviour, productivity and distribution of supplies. Following the normal Acholi society customs of masculinity and marital obligations, a husband provided for his 'family' and ensured everyone in the household lived according to the LRA regulations. In this respect, the status accorded to a man through marriage gave them power over women and authority to take care of their wife/wives by providing an authorised house, food, coordination among wives and security. On the other hand, the 'marriages' forced the girls to take on roles as sexual partners, mothers to the children born from these relationships and domestic workers (cooks, water collectors, porters, food producers and gatherers). At household level, men had many wives, with some commanders housing up to 25 wives (see also Carlson & Mazurana, 2008; Annan *et al.*, 2008). Two or three wives shared a house and a husband had his own house where one of the wives cooked and spent one night with him at a time. The participants talked about girls and women sharing a cordial relationship with their 'co-wives', where a new wife was expected to respect older ones. However, since they had to compete for supplies and attention from the husbands, sharing a man with many other young women was far from easy, and conflicting relations among the wives were reported (see also Kramer, 2012).

The participants described a range of feelings towards their 'husbands', with 55 per cent reporting fair treatment from their 'husbands', including being loved, protected, provided for,

⁵⁰Interview, CM10, Kitgum town centre, 18/10/2012

and not being unnecessarily punished or overworked during movements. As Evaline's experience relates, the good husband's care and compassion intensified when the wife conceived:

...although he was much older than me, he showed me care by treating me nicely. He never beat me or made me carry heavy loads. When I conceived his child, he cared for me so well by providing necessities and ensuring my safety. Whenever we were under attacks, he would not leave me but stopped to fire while I ran for my life. He was not like other men who left their wives on their own in such circumstances.⁵¹

This high figure is surprising because LRA fighters have been generally portrayed as only monsters that treated abducted girls in an inhumane manner. This evidence suggests that as individual husbands, it is possible they sympathised with the abducted girls even when the system they served did not permit them to do so. This good treatment should not nonetheless be taken as evidence that all men were sympathetic and capable of caring and providing for their wives. Some of the participants suffered further familial abuse at the hands of men they ended up with. Such husbands were described as very harsh and abusive, overworking their wives and often punishing them for petty mistakes. This domestic violence made life in captivity even more difficult for young girls who did not know how to handle family issues. Abducted at the age of 9, Akumu's experience portrays the difficulty of being a wife at an early age in armed groups:

...when the man I stayed with turned me into a wife; I had not learnt much about cooking...I could not properly mingle posho (maize bread). Even the sauce, they liked *Adyebo* (green leafy vegetable), I did not know how to properly cook it. Every time I took my food with other wives, to a place where these commanders ate from, my food was always rejected. As a punishment, he beat and accused me of being careless and a poor cook. Some days, if he didn't feel like beating me, he forced me to eat all of my food and drink 5 liters of water.⁵²

In the interviews, using the word marriage to describe the unions in which the participants were placed seemed misplaced. While they eventually called these relationships bush marriage, many simply referred to phrases like, I was forced to live with this man, I had to be with this man to survive, and this man did not treat me bad. With only two women in the sample still married to their bush husbands at the time of field work, most women did not understand these relationships as actual marriages for them and never considered a long-term relationship with the

⁵¹Interview, CM 43

⁵² Interview, CM40, Kitgum Town council, 15/11/2012

men once they returned home. This can also be related to stigma attached to these relationships in Acholi (Chapter 7). As discussed in the marriage chapter, the former female abductees prefer marrying men with no abduction past as one way of redeeming their identity, which has been stained by their association with *olum-olum*.

Although girls in the LRA went through more or less similar experiences with regard to the journey of becoming a wife and subsequent marriage experiences, each story remains different and distinct, reflecting what they remember most clearly about this part of their captivity experience, including the *ting ting* times, the first day they were raped, or their treatment by their husband. Also, falling under different female categories (women in high ranks, commanders' wives, senior women, ordinary wives and non-wives—*ting ting* and full time fighters), their interests and experiences of marriage were not uniform, but shaped by their status. Depending on their age and time spent in captivity, they had flexibility to progress from one status to another and negotiate their marriage positions at household level and in the camps. The other experiences of captivity and marriage that stand out in their narrations are their pregnancy and motherhood experiences.

5.3 Pregnancy and Motherhood in Stressful Conditions

As Catherine's story (Table 5.1) demonstrates, apart from the abductions, initiation ceremonies, military training and forced marriage practices, another level of connecting the abducted girls to their abductors was through early forced pregnancies. The unions the girls ended up in included a familial aspect where children were born and raised by abducted mothers and their captor husbands (see also Carlson & Mazurana, 2008:7, 14–15). It is clear that forcibly impregnating girls and women was a multiplication strategy for the LRA leaders. They forced every couple to have as many children as they could. They were against any form of birth control method. Studies estimate that 30 per cent of girls that exited the armed group did so as child mothers (Mazurana & MacKay, 2004:9). UNICEF noted that in 2005, 3,500 child mothers had exited the LRA (cited in ACORD, 2007:47). There is overwhelming evidence that half of abducted girls bore children as a result of the marriage practices in the LRA (see McKay & Mazurana, 2004:88, Annan *et al.*, 2006, 2008; UNICEF, 2006). In the current sample, most of the participants bore children fathered by the LRA fighters (68 children were born, including those that died in the LRA camps and back home. At the time of fieldwork, 59 children were still alive).

The longer term effects of marriage and child bearing practices were diverse. Child mothers were to care for children and maintain affiliation with their ‘_husbands’. This adherence allowed the continuation of supplies, because without husbands, child mothers reported facing challenges in looking after their children. Basically, having a child to depend on the mother, and the mother on the husband, underpinned the marriage system. Breaking these dependencies became difficult for child mothers.

Bearing children was one way of keeping girls in the LRA for a long time, exerting control on them and dissuading them from attempting to escape. Bearing children was effective in controlling child mothers, both physically and psychologically (Carlson & Mazurana, 2008) and that partly explains their prolonged stay with the armed group in comparison to non-child mothers. For example, the participants’ length of life in captivity ranged from 3 months to 12 years, averaging 5 years. Most of those who stayed for less than 6 years were never married or were married but returned with no children. Unlike other female abductees, child mothers had limited opportunities to leave the armed group since they could not easily escape with children. Many of them did not consider leaving them behind; for example, only one participant purposely escaped without her two-year-old son because she thought the child was better off with the LRA rather than with her back home. Such actions show the fear and stigma that engulfed girls when they thought of returning home with children born in captivity. Not knowing how their families and communities would react, they questioned and postponed the option of returning home. It is no surprise that many of the participants escaped as soon as they realized they were pregnant. Apart from being less stressful and less risky giving birth back at home, such girls could also disguise a child’s birth roots. Considering that having a child out of wedlock leaves an Acholi girl negatively perceived and devalued in the society (Chapter 7), giving birth cemented child mothers’ already stigmatised identity. With a child, they could not deny their association and illicit intercourse with the rebels. Returning home presented a dilemma, and this could explain why some of them saw leaving the children with their fathers as the only alternative.

Pregnancy and motherhood stories reveal added specific difficulties the participants faced while in captivity: their pregnancy and motherhood was described as the toughest experience in captivity. This experience varied, however, according to location and helpfulness of the husband. Surviving pregnancy and childbirth was more likely in Sudan than in Uganda. While it was the

duty and responsibility of girls to engage in battles and loot food, pregnant and new mothers in Sudan stayed behind in the camps looking after themselves and their children. Allowances were made for people with special needs (expectant mothers and the injured) who were confined in a *sickbay* (a camp for children, new mothers and the injured, commonly referred to as *bay*) in preparation for delivery. The LRA trained some of their abductees as *medics*, and these treated illnesses and prescribed medicine for the sick, and also served as traditional birth attendants and obstetricians⁵³. Unlike those who had to carry out operations in Uganda, expectant mothers in *bays* at least got some good care and attention from the *medics*, other mothers and *ting ting*. Although the findings propose that, in Sudan, there were arrangements for antenatal care in Juba hospital; this was mainly for wives of senior officers/commanders. Most child mothers gave birth with the help of the birth attendants, using rudimentary methods: Nighty, who delivered her first child at the age of 13 in Juba hospital, had this to say about her second birth: ...for my second child, I almost died. Those older women who were acting as birth attendants and midwives had to put a mingling stick in my mouth so that I could push the baby out...⁵³ Such rudimentary tools and measures used ended up doing more damage to the girls and their children. Some were left with damaged bladders and other reproductive health difficulties.

On the other hand, while working in Uganda, it was business as usual for pregnant women and new mothers, moving up and down, constantly under attack, going on without water and food, just like other soldiers. In the absence of birth attendants, women relied on the help of their husbands, who were often advised to be as close to their wives during movements, as they would be the only help available at the time of labour:

Labour started while I was in the company of only the young girls who had never given birth. Luckily, my husband had isolated himself to travel with me. While in Sudan and Uganda, I was one of those untrained obstetricians⁵⁴ and I helped deliver other women. I had witnessed many girls and women giving birth so I knew precisely what to do during labour. I pushed with his encouragement. I knew how to separate the baby from the mother using the experience I had gained helping other women...

Upon successful⁵⁴ delivery in the jungle, some new mothers were forced to continue with military operations, risking their lives and those of their babies further: a month after delivering my baby, I went for the operation where I was shot and injured. The bullet ripped through my

⁵³Interview, CM15, Omiya Anyima, 6/11/2012

⁵⁴Interview, CM43, 14/12/2012.

back passing out through my stomach consequently incapacitating me to move in the speed of the group.⁵⁵ Some of them lost their children during intensive fighting or due to lack of health care. Taking care of a baby in the jungle was hectic and more draining for the women: Evaline started trekking to Uganda with her unit, two weeks after delivery: ‘...as a new mother, walking long distances with a child was exhausting, for example the group reached the next destination in the night and rested but for a mother, you had to boil water to bathe the baby and at times all you wanted was to get some sleep...’⁵⁶ Such anecdotes show the extremely difficult circumstances child mothers go through while with armed groups.

Difficult pregnancy, motherhood and life in captivity that the participants endured are revealed in the reasons they gave for choosing specific names for their children, including *Aneno/Onenocan* (meaning ‘I have suffered a lot’), *Acayo/Ocayo* (‘I am despised’), *Aciro/Akanyo* (‘I have endured a lot of suffering’), *Komakech* (‘I am unfortunate’), *Akwero* (‘I did not want her father and the relationship was not my choice’: *kwero* means ‘to refuse or reject’), *Ocan/Acan* (‘I have problems’), *Olara* (‘God saved me from death’), *Aryemo* (‘her father was always chasing me away from his home’: *ryemo* means ‘chase/send away’), *Aloyo*, (‘I am victorious’), among other names.⁵⁷ The names obviously depict the pain and suffering these mothers went through in captivity and their future plight. Writing about children born in captivity in northern Uganda, Apio (2007:101) notes that, ‘these names compile all the bad experiences of a mother into the name and give it a living reminder in the nature of her baby’.

5.4 Exiting the LRA

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the day of abduction remains an important part of the participants’ experience. In the same way, the day they exited the LRA remains a defining moment for them; a day they left a violent and stigmatising life in captivity and changed their status to ‘former abductees’. Like many of the abducted children in Uganda (see Medeiros, 2014; McKay & Mazurana, 2004; Veal & Stavrou, 2003), the participants left the armed group in three ways: rescue, release and escape. A small number of them was rescued by the UPDF during crossfire or were released by LRA fighters and leaders, while the majority (77%) escaped.

⁵⁵Interview, CM28, Omiya Anyima, 8/11/2012.

⁵⁶Interview, CM43.

⁵⁷ In Acholi culture, male names start with letter ‘O’ and female names with ‘A’ (field notes, 2013).

Although the consequences, in the form of brutality and death, if they were caught trying to escape were well known to them, escape stories recount individual and collective efforts to flee or to step out of a stigmatising and violent environment. This ability demonstrates a capacity for rational choice and for resistance, resilience and determination with astonishing bravery.

They escaped during times of fighting and when supervision was low (sleeping time, when sent to collect water/other materials or during convoys). It was difficult to escape from Sudan, and they waited until their units returned to Uganda to fight, abduct and loot. Constant attacks on the LRA by the UPDF facilitated opportunities to escape. This particularly favoured girl combatants who had gained the commanders' trust. They took advantage of this trust and rank privileges to facilitate their escape: I was never under tight security because the LRA commanders did not think I could escape... One day I decided to escape... I returned with seven people.⁵⁸ Such courage reveals that girls and young women often consciously and effectively devise ways to make the best of their adverse life situations, and such efforts must be taken seriously, even though they may entail grievous risks for themselves or other people.

Apart from the determination to be free, friendship (with fellow soldiers and commanders), bombardments from opposing groups, and knowledge of locations girls found themselves in also evoked escape plans. Their personal escape or negotiation for release were not only arrived at because of a sudden chance to escape or feelings of being tired of life in captivity, but their exit came out of such unanticipated factors and opportunities that enabled them to break free of their captivity. Recognising a village, a mountain, a stream, or a trading centre, they found the courage to attempt escape. For those who did it collectively, they did not need to be friends, or with the same status. When the escape opportunity availed itself, they become one category—captives—, united by the idea, opportunity and desperation to be free. Abuu remembers how their commander's wife initiated the idea of escaping:

...there was a woman who had lived in the bush for years, and was married to our unit's commander ... she came to us [two friends] and suggested that ~~since~~ we are in Uganda, near home, we should think about escaping before going back to Sudan." Then at night, around 9:00 pm, in March 2004, we escaped, four people. We brought a girl that had been given to the commander to take care of her, and the three of us.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Interview, CM55

⁵⁹ Interview, CM 35, Kitgum Town centre, 15/11/2012.

Despite the grave violence and abuse they lived under, the participants made rational choices that helped them develop social relationships with girls in similar situations and made the best out of these.

Since it was more difficult for child mothers to escape alone, they relied on friendships developed (including with their husbands) to leave the LRA. After a number of years in captivity, some girls found themselves in a position to negotiate their release with the top leadership or their husbands. For example, when her group had returned to Uganda to fight Catherine (Table 5.1) negotiated with her husband to have her and their son released:

I did not just escape. Kapere released me to return home when I requested him to do so... I told him we would meet again in future if God had destined us to be together again... on the day, he gave me six soldiers to accompany me up to my home Trading Centre. He instructed them to hand me over to civilians in their gardens or let me go if they failed to find some civilians...⁶⁰

Such anecdotes show how some male rebel fighters sympathised with female abductees as their wives. The favoured treatment was evident not only in terms of protection and provision, but also through this collaboration to exit the armed group.

5.5 Concluding Remarks

We have seen in this chapter that, in a single day, in the LRA context, the participants' acceptable identity as Acholi girls was stripped of them and they were forced to adopt or accept a new identity of *olum-olum* (people of the bush or rebels). Their routines and responsibilities changed and although they still carried out domestic roles and served others, as was the case in their families, these roles became secondary. Instead they were trained to walk long distances, work with the gun and fight in a brutal conflict in which many survived only with severe injuries or were otherwise traumatised. Performance of certain stigmatising acts was imposed on them, including violence, looting, killing, rape and early pregnancy, among others. Coming from a culture that detests illicit sexual activities and bearing children out of wedlock and any form of violence, their new identify becomes—as Martin-Baro (1994:132) calls it, a stigmatising identity—of *olum* (rebel).

⁶⁰Interview, CM 25, Omiya Anyima, 7/11/2012.

As with the day of abduction, a successful escape is remembered in detail, but this time with a sense of triumph and achievement. The individual accounts have a shared theme with their principal mission being to survive, reunite with their families and reclaim their freedom and identity. Reading their stories, one begins to understand the courage they must have had to risk their lives and those of their children by attempting to escape. Although some of them had been in captivity for a long time and were traumatised, they were able to trace their families when they escaped. Passing through one or more unfamiliar communities or going through reception centres, they finally reunited with their families. At the time of the interviews, the majority had been home for a long time (6–10 years) and were attempting to rebuild their lives. The following chapters discuss the other three central themes of their socio-economic reintegration, including stigmatisation, marriage and livelihoods.

CHAPTER SIX

'THE WOMAN WHO WAS IN THE BUSH': LIVING WITH STIGMA

The Integrated DDR Standards note that reintegration is *primarily taking place in the community at the local level*' (UN, 2006: Chapter 1.10.2). The interviews suggest that the community is the most important reference point for formerly abducted individuals. The women in the current sample often declared that maintaining good relationships with people in the surrounding settings was a necessary element of a successful reintegration into civil life. However, a healthy relationship with their community members is something many of the participants still struggled to achieve at the time of this study.

Early in the research process, it became obvious that what the participants have in common is the stigma they experience as a consequence of their abduction and life in captivity. Thus, the analysis of their reintegration progress and experience cannot be explicit and comprehensive without exploring this stigma. The findings overwhelmingly support the hypothesis that stigmatisation hinders long term reintegration. It separates former abductees from the rest of the people by devaluing and discriminating against them. In Uganda, the notion of *stigma*' has been explored in relation to HIV/AIDS and mental illness, but it has not been extensively examined in studies of female soldiering. As a defining element of social acceptance in the society, the chapter analyses stigma from the perspective of the participants.

6.1 Stigma

The term *stigma*' derives from a Greek word that refers to bodily signs/marks believed to expose something abnormal and bad about the moral status (flawed and polluted) of an individual, who was therefore to be avoided in the public sphere (Goffman, 1960:11). Since its initial articulation in the 1960s, the concept has undergone significant shifts in definition: stigma is used more to mean *social disgrace*' rather than referring to any bodily evidence. However, analysis is still too heavily focused on psychological approaches (see Major & O'Brien, 2005) compared to attempting to understand stigma and stigmatised individuals in local contexts. Although Goffman (1960), in discussing the concept, included both psychological and social elements of stigma, his characterization and ideas have mostly been used in studying and analysing the psychological impact of stigma on individuals—processes by which it is internalised and how it shapes behaviour. However, how stigma affects and changes the social

life and relationships of individuals in local contexts is still less explored (Parker, 2003). For instance, it is only recently that the fields of sociology (see Link & Phelan, 2001) and anthropology (see Yang & Kleinman, 2008; Link & Phelan, 2007) have started contributing to understanding stigma and its impacts.

Scholars of stigma regard the concept as a social construction (a label attached by society) and observe that it varies across individuals and stigmatised groups, and across time and cultures (Goffman, 1960; Crocker *et al.*, 1998; Jones *et al.*, 1984). Goffman (1960:12) defines stigma as an attribute that is deeply discrediting. An individual is stigmatised when he or she possesses (or is believed to possess) some attribute or characteristic that conveys a social identity that is devalued in a particular social context (Crocker *et al.*, 1998:505). According to English (1971:162), stigma might be best considered to be the negative perceptions and behaviours of so-called-normal people to all individuals who are different from themselves. Thus, the discrediting attribute reduces the individual with the attribute/character from a complete and normal person to a stained, polluted, devalued, spoiled, flawed and inferior one (Crocker *et al.*, 1998; Jones *et al.*, 1984).

These definitions and characterizations share the assumption that individuals who are stigmatised actually have an attribute that marks them as different and leads them to be devalued in the eyes of others. This classic view of social stigma suggests that the stigmatised individual is born with this deeply discrediting attribute; for example, all the physically disabled and mentally ill are seen through this lens (Goffman, 1963; Jones *et al.*, 1984). On the other hand, other stigma scholars acknowledge that stigma is a social construction, but argue that the stigmatised individuals are not different from normal people and that they engage in the same life processes as normal people (see Crocker *et al.*, 1998). Cumming and Cumming (1965:449–50) note that whether it is a visible mark or an invisible stain, stigma acquires its meaning through the emotion it generates within the person bearing it and the feeling and behaviour toward him of those affirming it. These two aspects of stigma are indivisible since they each act as a cause or effect of the other. Drawing from sociological and anthropological analyses of the concept (see Yang & Kleinman, 2008; Link & Phelan, 2007), this study looks at stigma as being embedded in contextual experiences.

6.2 Interpreting Stigma in Acholi

Studies have shown that former child soldiers often experience stigma in their communities (see Annan *et al.*, 2007, 2011; Betancourt *et al.*, 2008b; Boothby, 2006; Williamson, 2006). As Helen's case in Table 6.1 shows⁶¹, stigmatisation was one of the major problems encountered by the participants when they first returned home (see also Mazurana & Carlson, 2004; HRW, 2002, 2003a, 2003b). More than 80 per cent of them reported still facing stigmatisation in their families and communities at the time of interviews. The study does not view formerly abducted individuals (the stigmatised) in Acholi as different from the rest of the people in the society. Their stigma came as a result of their forced recruitment and stay in captivity. As a result, they are persons with a particular moral status in a society where moral standing is determined by the local social world. Maintaining this moral status is dependent on meeting social standards, obligations and norms. However, because of their association with the LRA ('people of the bush'), formerly abducted individuals are not *fully* able to meet these social moral standards. Due to their stigma, their ability to establish and hold on to what is important to them, such as their social interactions, relationships and marriages, is constrained, hence limiting their life opportunities.

⁶¹ Interview, CM 50, Lokung, November, 2012

Table 6.1: Living with Stigma—Helen’s Story

Thirty six year old Helen was abducted on July 1st, 1990 at about 9:00 am from her parents’ home in Kitgum district. She was 14 years old. After 14 years in captivity, she returned to her parents’ home in Kitgum. While she faced many challenges in her village when she first returned home, like other returnees, stigmatisation was the worst. People abused and stigmatised her publically: ‘this made me feel and live like a stranger in my mother’s house. Life at home became an entirely new thing’. Some people in the village said she had returned as LRA intelligence collaborator spying on their lives and would invoke LRA killings in the area. Others accused her for having led LRA fighters to commit atrocities like murdering their family members and torching their huts in their village while she was still in the bush. She laboured to explain herself in vain. There were farmers’ groups which she attempted to join but she failed. Because of the amount of stigma she received from the village members, she found it difficult to freely interact with them. It took her a long time to begin to move around and associate with other people.

After four years of reintegrating, Helen got married in a neighbouring village. Stigmatization followed her there. Her husband had agreed to look after her three daughters that Helen had returned with from captivity. However, people cautioned and advised him against taking care of the children, calling them rebels. The husband started getting very negative towards the children and Helen took them back to their grandmother (Helen’s mother).

In her marital home and village, Helen faces high levels of stigmatisation. Some people say because she was used to hacking people to death while in the bush, she is dangerous. Others tell her husband to leave her because he is only keeping a rebel, who is not suitable to be a wife. In all social gatherings, in drinking joints and meetings in her village, people keep reminding her of her past each time she attends and tries to contribute her opinions to the matter under discussion: ‘I regard all this negative treatment as serious insults of my sufferings because I never joined the LRA willingly and it pains me when I see it is increasingly spilling over to the children. All this stigmatisation makes me wonder why I even returned home. Honestly, if there was a way of returning to the bush so that I could be free from this stigmatisation and harassment, I would....’ Although the children are accommodated at their grandmother’s home, they are also stigmatised by the family members, neighbours and at school. Helen has visited their school to try and discuss with the teachers to protect the children against stigma but this has not helped. Helen’s daughters are now approaching their teens and are beginning to question why they are insulted and stigmatised. They are demanding their mother to show them their ‘real’ (father’s) home. Helen is worried about her daughters’ future and how she will explain their predicament to them.

Contd.

In her five year marriage, Helen is finding it very difficult to associate with others in her homestead and village: I am very unhappy about what people including my husband tell me especially when drunk. He insults me using very bad words that keep reminding me of my past. He also tells me of certain annoying things that people tell him. My relationship with my in-laws is the worst kind of relationship I have ever seen. Some of them are among the people who talk very ill about me and sometimes they insult me over no clear reason... I am continuously unhappy and in dilemma.'

When Helen learnt that returnees could find help from the sub county authorities, she sought help to stop people from attacking and stigmatising her and the children. This has been in vain however. She first took her case to the village local council (government) leader who was reluctant to address the issue. Helen later approached the sub county Amnesty International agent/officer. She also sought help from the Community Development Officer. These officers took up her case and had some of her stigmatizers arrested. However, nothing was done about them and they were later released without any punishment. This made Helen very frustrated: the challenge remains getting someone who can help me get justice, so that those behaving in unkind manners to me are punished. When we [formerly abducted people] report our cases to sub county authorities, we do not get justice.' With the authorities reluctant to address stigmatisation, Helen is left with limited options: all I am doing now is to concentrate on things I can do with minimal interaction with others. I isolate myself from those abusive people. I no longer attend some of the community gatherings. I prefer to spend my time alone in my home. To avoid being a bother to the sub county leaders, I have also stopped visiting them to follow up on my complaints...'

As Helen's case demonstrates, formerly abducted persons face resistance in their attempts to regain the complete trust and acceptance of the people in their surroundings. Because of their association with the rebels they also became, from the perspective of their families and communities, people of the bush, whatever the circumstances of their recruitment (see also Coulter, 2009:209). They are perceived to be dangerous, or feared. They are *feared* because they are from an unknown, suspicious and stained background, and people imagine that what they did while in captivity can be easily repeated in the community. Inability or unwillingness to

fully forgive, accept and reintegrate them indicates the social incapability to cope with their past experiences (Coulter, 2009:201). Whereas humanitarian workers and researchers may perceive former abducted girls (and boys) as innocent victims, their communities nevertheless look at and treat them with caution, as potentially dangerous.

As we have seen from Helen's case (Table 6.1) stigma promotion in Acholi is more applied to negative stereotypes that are ascribed to the formerly abducted individuals than to their association with the LRA itself. In any culture, stereotypes (positive and negative) and evaluations are generally widely shared and well known among the inhabitants (Crocker *et al.*, 1998; Steele, 1997). These stereotypes and evaluations become a basis for excluding members of the negatively stereotyped category (Leary & Schreindorfer, 1998; Major & Eccleston, 2004). This implies that stigma is manifested when negative stereotyping, discrimination, labeling, rejection and exclusion processes unfold (Link & Phelan, 2001). Often, terms like discrimination, labelling, rejection and exclusion, among others, are used interchangeably with 'stigma', but the data and other research suggest that the concept is broader and more inclusive than any of the above mentioned processes. The current study contends that, although stigma may share features across contexts, it uniquely impacts individuals in local contexts, hence understanding such unique social and cultural processes that create stigma should be the focus of efforts at addressing stigma.

While people in Acholi acknowledge that formerly abducted individuals were recruited against their will, their stigmatisation derives from their assumed 'stained' and 'polluted' personality (possession of *cen*) and what they did or was done to them while in captivity. As discussed in Chapter three, a person's 'pollution' arises from being in contact with unresolved murder, accidental death or coming across the body of someone who has been killed violently. Individuals who were abducted and who are therefore expected to have killed or have seen people being killed or passed through areas where murder was committed are believed to be 'polluted' or 'haunted' by the vengeful spirits of the dead (*cen*). They are seen as the vehicles through which *cen* might enter the community and are in need of cleansing. Because of her or his experience, a former abductee in Acholi is basically seen as someone possessing two personalities, a 'normal' and the 'tainted' or 'polluted' self. Benson, a former boy soldier, described in a family discussion an incident he had encountered in his village a few weeks before

the interview: recently, the Village Health Team was given bicycles and this caused a saga. The community members were saying that one of the guys who got a bicycle was an individual with two personalities—a bush‘ and a normal‘ man...⁶² Due to their association with the LRA, former abductees are no longer seen as entirely *whole* individuals, but as persons whose *being* is stained‘, confused‘ and mentally unsound‘. Agnes remembers how her sanity was questioned when she first returned home after six years in captivity: some people said because I had spent six long years in the bush, I could be mentally unstable. It did not go down so well with me because I knew I was mentally sound despite the bad things I had gone through while in the bush...⁶³ As Helen’s case (Table 6.1) points out, because of their stigma, they are discriminated against in village events and projects and are seen as highly unfit to relate with normal‘ people in their communities. They are seen as unfit to occupy significant village positions:

...the never abducted people think and look at us who have returned from the bush as senseless. For example in community meetings, if they are electing any leader, they do not think we [returnees] have reasonable opinions. Instead they think that in case we are angered, we can turn against the people. This is the reason why they don’t elect us into local leadership positions. In such meetings, even if you raise your hand, they will not point at you until you go back home...⁶⁴

Throughout the field research process, it was apparent that people distrust former abductees and this is because of the belief that their stay with the LRA left them contaminated‘. Irrespective of gender, age and length of abduction, they are seen as possessing the bush mentality‘—dangerous, unintelligent, offensive, intolerant, terrible and uncivilised mindset or behaviour. This supposed *bush mentality* is the attribute dictated entirely by their stay in captivity (the bush‘), which creates an identity that is devalued and associated almost exclusively with negative connotations (evil‘, dangerous, possessed, etc.). This kind of attitude is not unique to Acholi; for example, in eastern Congo, former girl soldiers are seen as possessing military mentality/spirit‘, meaning one can easily get angry or that he or she is affected and possessed by a demon/evil spirit (Tonheim, 2012:284; see also Coulter, 2009:216 in Sierra Leone). Hence, stigma promotions are the negative reaction(s) that formerly abducted girls (and boys) receive from community members because of their military background/experiences. They are stigmatised

⁶²Former male child soldier, Family Member Discussion (FMD03)

⁶³Interview, CM28, Omiya Anyima, Kitgum, 8/11/2012.

⁶⁴Formerly abducted participant in FGD04 with Young Women in Pader.

because they are seen as having deviated from the cultural norms of honesty, intelligence, purity, wholeness, attractiveness etc.

The findings suggest that two worlds exist for the former abductees, living side by side as separate entities—a *‘bush’* identity and the *‘normal’* world of life in the village—and they are confined to the *‘bush’* world. Although they have complete access to the *‘normal’* world, and they live in close physical proximity with other *‘normal’* people, because of this trait (*bush* experience), they are singled out and labelled *‘different’*, *‘strange’* or even *‘dangerous’*. Commonly, being a former abductee is associated with worthlessness and disgrace, and, as Festo remarked in an interview, an abduction past is commonly used as a form of abuse: *‘for example if a person wants to describe your bad behaviour/action (s), they say ‘you behave like someone who has returned from the bush.’*⁶⁵ In essence, this *bush* world does not exist, it is simply a negative stereotype associated with the LRA members, and when this association is known to others, it blemishes an individual’s identity by cutting him or her *‘off’* from the society and from herself so that she stands a discredited person facing an un-accepting world’ (Goffman, 1960:31).

According to Dijker and Koomen (2007:6), stigmatisation is *‘the process by which an individual’s or group’s character or identity is negatively responded on the basis of the individual’s or group’s association with a past, imagined, or currently present deviant condition, often with harmful physical or psychological consequences for the individual or group’*. When *‘stigmatisation’* is used in the current study, it means stigma promotion (to negatively portray or branding participants as *disgraceful*), including any off-putting thoughts, feelings, inappropriate language or actions intended to constitute defamation or slander of the participants. Stigmatisation in this sense targets the formerly abducted individuals because they are seen as what Behrend (1999) calls *‘internal strangers’* in Acholi. In her analysis of the rise of Lakwena’s movement that gave way to the LRA, she notes that when the Acholi ex-soldiers returned home after the National Resistance Army took power in 1986, they were believed to have contracted *cen* following their participation in fighting. However, following their refusal to go through cleansing ceremonies, they were stigmatised and accused of bringing trouble to Acholi. Their failed social reintegration is said to have contributed to the continuation of the war in northern

⁶⁵Former boy abductee (Male01), interviewed alongside his former captive wife (CM57), Laroo, Gulu 07/02/2013.

Uganda (see Chapter 2). This is similar to the LRA returnees, who are also believed to have contracted the potentially deadly *cen*, and their abduction past not only stands in the way of their complete integration (as *_normal* Acholi persons), it is a foundation of the wall dividing them from the non-abductees. Their acquaintances use inappropriate language which is stigma promoting, including, *_stupid*, *_rebel*, *_bush* behaviour, *_mentally unstable* and *_evil spirit possessed*, among others (see also Carlson & Mazurana, 2004:8; Burman & McKay, 2007). Such a negative language that exhibits varieties of discrimination aims at explaining the stigmatised person's state of *_differentness* or to account for the danger he or she represents and, effectively, often subconsciously reduces an individual's life opportunities.

As we saw with Helen's (Table 6.1) experience, stigma promotion in Acholi extends to children born in captivity as well (see also Mazurana & Carlson, 2008; Coulter, 2009:232; Ndossi, 2010:134). *_Name-calling* for children was reported in the interviews to be common in the family and wider community. Most mothers who lived with their children in new marriages reported stigmatisation from step-fathers, in-laws and people in the surrounding settings. In families and communities, boys and girls are stereotyped differently with respect to name-calling and abuse. Boy children are, for example, commonly referred to by their *_LRA* fathers' names even if their mothers changed their names upon return. Because their fathers are/were rebels, the children (particularly the boys) are seen as having inherited their fathers' negative behaviour. The boys are more prone to remarks of *_uselessness*: *_people really stigmatise my child a lot saying his father is a rebel and he will have no use to the community in the future...*⁶⁶ *_I abandoned my marriage after only 8 months there because I could not stand stigmatisation. People said that if my boys [born in captivity] grow up, with the bush mentality inherited from their father, they will break the man's home...*⁶⁷ Girls are linked to their mothers' perceived weak points when they (girls) are short of favour—which occurs frequently in comparison to other categories of children. Step-fathers were reported to model insulting words for these children on their mothers; words like *_stupid*, *_senseless*, *_bush* mentality/behaviour were commonly applied to both mother and girls. In other cases, whereas the child's extended family treats him or her with love and care, stigmatisation was expressed by neighbours, peers at school and in the playground, or other community members.

⁶⁶ Interview, CM9, AmidaSub County.

⁶⁷ Interview CM 35, Kitgum town.

Such findings imply that when girls return home with children fathered by the rebels, because the father is unknown and/or an enemy, the girls' stigma becomes greater. Also, because children are commonly viewed with contempt and as potential rebels of tomorrow, even if the girls are welcomed and accepted back in their families, nevertheless, as long as their children are resented and stigmatised, this still affects the mothers' wellbeing and relationships with their families and communities (McKay & Mazurana, 2004:53). This kind of stigma promotion not only acts as a barrier to long term reintegration, it also increases the individual's daily emotional distress by generating a sense of guilt that triggers feelings of helplessness, loneliness and depression. The fact that mothers cannot protect their children from stigma creates further emotional distress. This consequence of stigma is destructive to their psychological recovery, as it reminds them of the life they lived and desperately want to forget. Due to widespread stigmatisation, such young women (and their children) are unable to build confidence, self-esteem and trust in their interactions and relationships in the community, hence hindering their social reintegration.

The negative perception towards this category of youth comes from four assumptions:

- 1) They were accustomed to violence and looting in the LRA and are still capable of such wrongdoing back in the community. Two illustrations may be cited: suppose a thief is arrested and taken to the local councils, you will hear people asking themselves that, ~~hasn't~~ that person [thief] been in the bush?" These generalizations pain and affect us [former abductees] who are innocent because we are all equated to wrongdoing⁶⁸; people say we [abductees] are insane, crazy and are capable of doing any bad things to people in the community...⁶⁹ Generally, people seem to be sceptical of former abductees, and they are often the first to be accused when something bad or unhelpful occurs in the community. Such accusations, where public wrongdoing is often attributed to them, are stigma promoting. Similar perceptions have been commonly reported in other African post-conflict settings (for examples, see Carames *et al.*, 2006; Coulter, 2009:215–16; Jennings, 2007; Tonheim, 2012:283; Avin, 2007:22).
- 2) All abducted girls were gang raped and possibly have HIV/Aids. Also, that they violated the traditional norms by engaging in sex and bearing children outside culturally

⁶⁸Former male child soldier, FMD03.

⁶⁹Interview, CM7.

recognised marriages (see also McKay & Mazurana, 2004; McKay, 2005; Coulter, 2009:216). This is explained further later on, under deviation stigma.

- 3) All former abductees participated in killings, leaving them contaminated with evil spirits of the dead (*cen*). Due to this contamination, when possessed, they can be harmful and unknowingly wreak havoc in their families and community. Seen as carriers of *cen* ('vengeful spirit'), they should be avoided so that the evil spirits do not attack, kill or transfer to the 'normal' individuals. As Abalo's circumstances show, this negative attitude comes to life when the women make 'mistakes' or if they pick a quarrel with other people: 'in any misunderstanding, people still insult me that I should not kill them with my rebel vengeful spirit'.⁷⁰
- 4) They were used to killing and hurting people while in captivity and are still capable of striking and being destructive if things do not go their way. This particularly affects the females' attempt to get married. In his anthropological study on northern Uganda, Finnstrom (2008:191) writes that 'many of my young male informants in Gulu town claimed that former rebel girls are morally compromised, thus dangerous, and not suitable marriage partners.' One of his participants in a group of elderly men remarked that 'she [abductee] can even kill you while you are asleep.' There is a lingering suspicion that such women can do something bad without thinking.

Although both males and females face stigmatisation, it remains severe for the females. A survey in northern Uganda found that formerly abducted females were at least twice as likely to report persistent family and community problems as males (Annan *et al.*, 2011:18). Finnstrom (2008:193) also found that 'in deeper sense, however, girls are also more often held to be impure sexually and thus morally more dubious, even more dangerous, than boys' (see also Angulo, 2000). Due to their perceived contaminated background (spiritually unclean), especially their children born in captivity, former girl soldiers face a greater stigma. They are seen as unmarriageable with an ability to introduce misfortunes and illness to their marital homes (this is discussed further in Chapter Seven).

⁷⁰Interview, CM21.

6.3 Physical and Deviation Stigma

The data reveal two kinds of stigma among the formerly abducted persons. These are similar to the types that Goffman (1960:14) identified particularly the physical deformities and deviation stigma. To conceptualise the term further, he (ibid: 14) reveals two perspectives of the types of stigma: *discredited* and *discreditable*. *Discredited* perspective describes an individual who assumes his differentness [stigma] is known about already or evident on the spot', while *discreditable* is used to describe an individual who assumes it [stigma] is neither known about by those present nor immediately perceivable by them'. With the known record of having been part of the LRA, the above types and perspectives of stigma are of great importance in the stigma analysis in Acholi. The *physical* and *deviation* in personal qualities are particularly used to explore the forms of stigma in relation to the participants.

6.3.1 Physical Stigma

Evidence has shown that child soldiers suffer all manner of physical injuries, and some have become handicapped with visible scars that cannot be healed (see Cohn & Goodwin-Gill, 1994). Basically, this leaves the former abductees with an extra stigma that is physical in nature (external deformations; scars and physical disability) that tends to be discredited rather than discreditable. Due to their observable scars or being physically handicapped, they cannot keep information about their stigma secret. Since people can straightforwardly identify the physical stigma, it can easily be used to attack the individual. Susan's condition illustrates this point: insults that target my injured body like, your leg is half, or your damaged face, are painful. Mentioning these affects the way I relate with such persons.⁷¹ Although such comments from the public could be innocent descriptions of an individual, if connected to the person's past (how she got the scars), the appearance becomes a source of questions and stigmatisation. An individual who is ...fully and visibly stigmatised, in turn, must suffer the special indignity of knowing that they wear their situation on their sleeve, that almost anyone will be able to see into the heart of their predicament' (Goffman, 1963:152). From Susan's circumstances, we also identify internal/self-stigmatisation among formerly abducted individuals. Any description of their appearance (innocent or not) is received with resentment and through a stigmatisation lens. This causes unnecessary tension between an individual and people around him or her.

⁷¹Interview, CM30.

6.3.2 Deviation Stigma

Due to their association with the ‘people of the bush’/a criminal group (LRA), illicit sexual intercourse and motherhood before marriage, all former girl abductees fall under this type of stigma. As we shall see in Chapter Seven, a girl giving birth without being legally married runs contrary to Acholi tradition and is perceived as a threat to the institution of marriage. When the abducted girls engaged in early marriage and pregnancy, either voluntarily or not, they deviated in personal qualities and are seen as damaged young women. There is an abiding assumption that girls were repeatedly raped by different men (gang rape) while in captivity and possibly are infected with HIV/Aids and other sexually transmitted diseases. Comments like ‘do you know how many men slept with/used that one?’ are common among the male youth: ‘suppose people hear that a certain man is dating you, they will start scaring him by asking him questions like, ‘this woman who returned from the bush, don’t you think she is infected with HIV/AIDS’, knowing how in the bush there, the LRA were roaming with them [abducted girls] just anyhow?’⁷³ Such quotations indicate the perception that they were willing wives of the rebels or simply gang rape victims (see also Stavrou *et al.*, 2000:16). However, as was seen in their stories of abduction (Chapter 5), this was not the case with the LRA, where gang rapes were not reported in the interviews. The girls and women were instead attached to one man until he died on the battlefield or of natural causes and then were transferred to another man. That explains why the spread of sexually transmitted diseases remained low in the LRA and the fact that all the child mothers know the men that fathered their children.

The roles the abducted girls undertook while in captivity, and how the marriages and child rearing policies were negotiated, are not well known in the community. The shock and wonder Kenneth and Diana (research assistants) expressed when we first started interviewing the women was revealing. Although they had heard abduction and life in captivity stories in the media and through neighbours, friends and previous research projects they had worked on, they had never encountered such detailed female narrations of life in captivity. Each story challenged their attitude to and understanding of the women’s ‘bush’ experiences. These two Acholi youth are

⁷² This perception and ill treatment is often directed at already married rape victims where they are either rejected by their husbands, other family members or lose support from spouses. Men fear that their raped wives could have been infected with the HIV virus (Human Rights Watch, 2005:34; Isis-WICCE, 2001:46).

⁷³ Interview, CM30, Kitgum town.

not alone; a single argument of sexually violated girl abductees persists not only in the literature but among the people of Acholi region. In general terms, former abductees (female and male) are simply called *olum-olum*, but on the basis of their assumed gender roles while in captivity, former boy abductees are commonly referred to as ‘*Kony soldiers*’ and the females, ‘*Kony wives*’ (victims of gang rape). Adopting this thought pattern (negative stereotype about the female experience in captivity) has left the former girl abductees’ identity compromised. From this perspective, their stigma as arises from the relationship between the attribute of abduction and the negative stereotype of what could have happened to them while in captivity. Hence, their stigma goes beyond being part of the rebel group and is further linked to the undesirable characteristic of their past. The acquired stigma of being a former abductee, coupled with resentment and discrimination in the communities, makes the women feel as though they have indeed transformed from a whole person to someone seen by others as substandard and unworthy.

A report by Save the Children noted of girls who participate in armed groups that ‘if a girl has had sexual contact with a man outside marriage—voluntarily or not—she is considered to no longer have value to the society’ (2005b:12). The current findings do not, however, entirely support this analysis. It is evident that the rape, forced marriage and child bearing strategies employed by the LRA to repress and control girls not only created terror, but also damaged the girls’ deepest values that any woman depends on in Acholiand. People are aware that many of the girls were abducted when they were still virgins and also recognise that they were sexually violated by the rebels. Although seen as ‘*spoil/damaged*’ goods, formerly abducted girls are not ostracised or publically blamed for the loss of their virginity. Also, it was not reported or sensed in the interviews that people viewed the women as completely useless to their families and community. They are still considered helpful, with some financially supporting their families (Chapter Eight). Having returned to their communities emotionally stressed, many are considerably regaining their self-confidence and self-esteem and becoming more helpful in their communities.

Back to their stigma, under normal circumstances, the women’s deviation stigma should be more likely to be discreditable than discredited. However, considering that they live in settings where everyone knows his or her neighbours and their backgrounds, their stigma is common knowledge

and difficult to conceal. Hobson (2005) writes that girl soldiers often feel the need to conceal their identities and blend into their surroundings due to fears of community retaliation or becoming ostracized.‘ However, in Acholi, it was extremely difficult for former girl abductees to simply blend in upon return. Actually, for any former abductee to have sneaked into the camps or villages and gone unnoticed was not possible. Because whenever children and adults were abducted, their families did not keep it as a secret. Villagers knew whose daughter/son/husband/wife had been recruited, and who had returned or was still missing. For those who returned with children, concealing their identities was not an option because the presence of their children made it impossible to deny their LRA experiences.

In Acholi contexts (where returnees, particularly in the villages, are known and easily identifiable by neighbours and friends), the individuals and their stigmatisers are not strangers or coming into contact for the first time, but acquaintances and intimates. However, in such settings, some individuals can still control information regarding their stigma. Although they often share the depth of their abduction experiences with other people like family members and close friends, findings suggest that some are not prepared to narrate their life ordeals to their acquaintances. On the one hand, this can be attributed to shame (internal stigma), worry of being heavily stigmatised or inability to respond to stigma promotion. Benson’s experience is helpful in explaining this point: if any one asked me about my abduction experience, I could bend my head down. Because of shame, I did not like to talk about it ... many times I could keep quiet or leave the place but this would still affect me. My mood would change as soon as I heard people talking about us [former abductees].⁷⁴ On the salient issues for formerly abducted youth in northern Uganda, Annan *et al.* (2009:650) write that, when youth experienced problems with neighbours or other community members, most of them described reacting passively—staying silent or walking away.‘ In Gulu town, 29-year-old Janet, abducted at the age of 16 for six years, returned with two children. While seeking her consent to participate in the study, she said to this author in English, ...my sister, I cannot tell you everything that happened to me while in captivity, it is very hard.‘ Then she asked to look at the interview questions, and with a fading smile, she said, ...the questions are moderate‘ and granted me an interview. It was difficult to comprehend what she meant by hard‘: did she consider her experience too sensitive and

⁷⁴ Former male child soldier, family discussion (FMD02), Kitgum, 12/10/2012.

unexplainable, was she ashamed of it or some of it, or did she simply not want (or know how) to tell it in detail? The reluctance to disclose what they did or was done to them in captivity can be interpreted as controlling the information on their stigmatising past (which is considered sensitive and private), confining it to their thoughts or behaviour consciously and subconsciously. Sharing as little as possible helps them avoid further stigmatisation from family and community members (we return to this later on).

It is possible that formerly abducted people do not simply want to be reminded of their past, or they are genuinely unable to articulate their experiences. However, considering that many women in the sample said that one proactive way of coping with or overcoming stigmatisation was to freely interact with community members, controlling information regarding their experiences or shying away when confronted works against this strategy. But again, through their close relations, some are encouraged or persuaded to confess their captivity experiences. The former abductees feel the need to confess to their families and friends the extent of their involvement with the LRA in the hope for acceptance, sympathy or the right cleansing rituals. In addition, before they commit themselves in a sexual relationship, they have to reveal their real identity to potential partners because, considering the nature of their communities (particularly villages), it is difficult for a man to intimately relate with a woman without learning about her background. So it is better if it comes from the woman and not the public. In return, the partners want to know more about what the women did or was done to them while in abduction, hence revealing in-depth information about their past (this partly explains why stigmatisation is higher in marriages, see Chapter Seven).

Nevertheless, based on how much of their experience they confess, there may be a difference in the way former abductees are stigmatised in the community. For example if one confesses to having killed while in abduction, he or she will definitely be seen as having deviated from personal quality and being a confirmed carrier of *cen*. On the other hand, if one limits the atrocity information, this leaves people in suspense regarding what that person may or may not have done while in captivity. In the latter scenario, the individual is able to limit the information on his/her deviation stigma, and it becomes internal stigma, which can also be a powerful survival method. It protects a person from being targeted for stigmatisation, and she or he is left to cope with the generalised stigma of being a former abductee.⁴ Since not telling people the

truth is not the same as denying being a former abductee, individuals rely on this strategy to silence their critics. When people call them ‘rebels’, some confidently reply by saying ‘it was not their choice to be abducted or stay in abduction for a long time’. They do not say they were never part of the LRA.

Furthermore, individuals relocate to new environments, for example moving to towns where they are not stigmatised (see also Carames *et al.*, 2006). When this happens, individuals are able to control their stigma and pass as non-abductees (‘normal’ people). An illustration may be cited. Florence and her husband Festo (both former abductees) left their villages and relocated to the outskirts of Gulu town, where their past is unknown. Because people do not know their true identity (former abductees), their military background is discreditable. Although Festo lost one of his legs to a land mine while in captivity, and he has to cope with the physical stigma like any other disabled person, his abduction past remains discreditable (unknown), ‘...I like sitting where men are gathered. I hear many bad comments about us [former abductees]...For example, you hear people saying, “so and so behaves as if she or he is from the bush” ... every time I go to where people are gathered, I must hear this comment ... that tells me that we are still stigmatised and discriminated...’⁷⁵ Aware that their experiences are not valued and they are expected to adopt the values of the community, it is a conscious decision for such individuals not to reveal their past in their new environments because of fear of driving people away from them.

Anonymity as a coping mechanism has been, in most cases, attached to female soldiers who chose ‘spontaneous reintegration’—those who found their own way back to their villages, perhaps moving in with family members, friends, or sympathetic adults, and going on to keep low profiles (see Burman & McKay, 2007; McKay, 2006:100; McKay & Mazurana, 2004:25). However, findings in Acholi indicate that, for different reasons including stigmatisation, even women who are ‘formally’ reintegrated in their communities of origin can relocate to new places where they can practise this secrecy coping method. Secrecy is a common strategy to deal with stigmatisation because it safeguards the individuals from resentment and discrimination. Under secrecy, the person is seen as a valued member of the community and this helps him or her to establish interpersonal relationships and evade betrayal. For example, Festo, with his abduction

⁷⁵ Interview Male01, Laroo, Gulu 07/02/2013.

past not assumed right away by people he meets in his new environment, is able to break the socio-cultural barrier to be among other men.

However, according to Goffman (1963:86), ‘...there is hardly such a thing as complete anonymity regarding social identity. It may be added that every time an individual joins an organization or community, there is a marked change in the structure of knowledge about him—a distribution and character—and hence a change in the contingencies of information control.’ Former abductees who relocate to new environments or do not give a full account of their abduction must face having formed some acquaintances while in captivity that they may have to meet in the community. For instance, if Festo meets one of his former abductee acquaintances in town or in his male gatherings, they will probably greet each other. This gives people (third parties) a chance to inquire and discover how the two know each other. Thus, the third parties may get to know of his deviant stigma. Therefore, Festo and others must face the fear of some people knowing about their past and identifying them as returnees, without them (Festo and others) knowing that such people exist and know. However, without such scenarios, Florence, Festo and the other six women in the sample who relocated to towns where their neighbours and friends have no idea of their past live free of negative perceptions. They instead concentrate on managing the information about their stigmatic attributes so that they are not exposed and rejected. They must live in secrecy and in paranoia of their true identity being revealed as one of them expressed, over and over at the end of our interview: ‘you [interview team] should not tell the community members that we were abducted because they will start talking about us for example, for me, I have never told anybody that I am from the bush.’⁷⁶ This shows how resentment from people is too painful for them to face.

One may wonder why many more of these women do not leave their stigmatising villages for new environments where their past is unknown. But as we saw earlier, in Acholi, for somebody to belong, be recognised and possess a defined social identity, connections and the views of other people carry vast influence (Chapter Four). A formerly abducted individual becomes complete and useful when embraced by the appropriate social relationship, including family and kinship. The formerly abducted (and other) women with no education or training to support their independent lives have to rely on this interdependence construct to survive. For many of

⁷⁶Interview, CM14.

formerly abducted girls, marriage seems like the only viable option to leave their villages, but this is still limited, because many of them end up marrying men in their immediate and social settings who already know their past. Staying in their villages or areas where their past is common knowledge means to face, every day, those who know their past and thus constant stigmatisation.

6.4 ‘You coming here to take my story has again upset my neighbours’: Sympathising with the Stigmatised

The first category of *‘sympathetic others’* are those who share an individual’s stigma (Goffman, 1963:31). The findings reveal that the former abductees rely on their fellow abductees to cope with the stigma and other challenges of reintegration (see also Bines, 2008). This was apparent in the initial days of their reintegration where former abductees who had already become used to the community advised the new returning abductees on how to cope with the stigmatisation and general life back home. Prossy’s experience is illustrative:

There was a girl who had returned from the bush before me, she gave me advice of not being alone, so as to avoid thoughts of what I had been through. She also encouraged me to keep attending church and get to know God. I liked to stay among my fellow former abductees.⁷⁷

Knowing from their experience what it is like to have this particular stigma, some of the girls provide their peers with advice and techniques of drawing moral support from surrounding people—for example, how to behave, who to associate with and how to respond to stigmatisation. This set of *‘sympathetic others’* also offers acceptance, the comfort of feeling at ease, just like a *‘normal’* person.

While formerly abducted girls in the same village can easily identify and relate with each other, this remains on an individual basis. Groups pioneered by the former abductees in Acholi remain low. In the current sample, only one participant, Prossy in Gulu (see Table. 8.1, Chapter Eight), had founded *Rubanga Aye Twero* (meaning *‘God is Able’*), a group for formerly abducted child mothers. Prossy informed the study that members often meet to discuss and advise each other on the daily life issues: *‘I feel good about our group. It is good to be in a group. In a group, you share ideas. When you have problems, you can be helped easily. If a problem comes to one of*

⁷⁷Interview, CM55.

the members, as a group, you will have the capacity to support that person faster.⁷⁸ Although many women in the sample are part of the general village saving or agricultural groups along with non-abductees, joining groups formed by their fellow abductees, their own kind, suffering similar stigma may be ideal and considered real ‘groups’ for them.

Unlike in the public eye, where they are seen as ‘mentally unstable’, with bush behaviour and as only helpless victims who are unable to express themselves, in a group of fellow former abductees, they are accepted, loyal to one another and can talk genuinely about their stigma and general life struggles. In such groups, they do not have to cover up their stigma or hold back/pretend so that they are accommodated by others. Like Prossy, they are expressive, understanding and advisers to each other on economic and social issues within their own group. Being part of the group helps them to recognise more ways in which they are stigmatised and how to respond to different kinds of stigma. Although the study did not establish how often the participants in villages or towns talk to each other (or how the community perceived this), it is deduced that such relationships develop between women with similar past experience and is evidence of them exhibiting agency.

However, while being part of a group is useful, some of them, due to shame and fear of being re-stigmatised in the community, may not desire to join or be part of groups for former abductees. It is also possible that women who think they have a better standard of living (level of education, earning some money or simply living in towns) may not wish to associate closely with their formerly abducted peers who are worse off. However, this assumption may be contrary to Prossy’s case because, of all the participants, she is the most economically ‘successful’ with a stable tailoring job in Gulu (see Table 8.1, Chapter Eight). Although she is not educated, having served as a corporal in the LRA for years left her equipped and confident with leadership skills that enable her to manage a group and be a source of counsel to other young women.

The second set of ‘sympathetic others’ are people who are ‘normal’ but, because of their special situation, are able to be intimately close to the secret life of the stigmatised. With such wise persons, the stigmatised do not need to feel ashamed nor pretend, because they are aware that in spite of their past/experience, they will simply be seen as an ordinary other. They do not need to

⁷⁸Interview, CM55.

exert self-control or cover up their stigma as they interact with the sympathetic others (Goffman, 1960:40–43). These can be of two types: the first is a person whose experience comes from working in an organisation which caters for the well-being of the stigmatised. In reference to the former abductees, this can be a person working closely with the reintegration centers or NGOs that advocate for the well-being of former abductees in Uganda. For example, Christopher, KICWA’s project manager, being a former abductee himself, relates to and sympathises with the stigma of other former child abductees. Similarly, some of the other staff members at the reception centres have siblings, clan members and friends with abduction past or who are still missing or assumed dead in captivity. With this background, they are in a position to sympathise and reach out to the formerly abducted individuals.

Also, because formerly abducted boys and girls are aware that the staff at reintegration centres like KICWA understand and are supportive of them, for different reasons, some of them drop in at the organisation’s office or approach their staff while in the field. Although they are back in the community, there is still an ongoing relationship between them and the reintegration agencies. The community is also aware of this special relationship and sympathy: when reintegration agency vehicles like KICWA or Amnesty are passing through the villages, community members tell us [the formerly abducted] that ~~there~~ is your vehicle passing”.⁷⁹ As a consequence, this relationship and projects targeting formerly abducted individuals re-stigmatise them. The community becomes jealous and resentful towards them because they are seen as benefitting from their stigma. Their friends respond unsympathetically, insensitively and at times harshly to their struggles to survive and improve their lives:

If they see any NGOs come looking for those who returned from the bush, they will say we have enjoyed a lot for having been in the bush, that the rebels should have abducted all people since we are enjoying our abduction. Now that you are meeting us and taking our stories, people think you came with money to give us. People look at us with hatred.⁸⁰

As we saw with Helen’s experience shows (Table, 601), the other kind of normal sympathiser is the individual who is biologically related to a stigmatised individual, e.g. a parent or sibling. Because of the shared relationship, the wider society tends to treat both individuals (returnee and parent or sibling) in some respects as one. Therefore, these sympathisers are obliged to share

⁷⁹Former male child soldier, FMD02, Amida, Kitgum, 12/10/2012

⁸⁰Interview, CM54, Lokung, 14/12/2012.

their daughter's or sister's stigma. They embrace this fate and go to support and live within the world of the stigmatised person to whom they are related. Some of the participants have the support of their families who take care of their children as they embark on their reintegration. In this way, they are supported, defended, sympathised with and share their stigma burden with family members:

When I returned to my village, my elder brother was constantly being insulted because of my presence at home. I was also scared of the people. Because of people's attitude, he worried that they would harm me and he asked me to go live with my aunt in Kitgum town and maybe one day by God's grace, if I get my own place, I will be happy and safe there.⁸¹

Although the evidence demonstrates how stigma is sympathised with and shared at the family level, it should not be assumed that all of the biological families express sympathy towards the abductees' stigma. Those with troubled family relationships in particular are shunned, insulted, rejected and intentionally or unintentionally stigmatised by their own family members. For those who are intentionally stigmatised, their experience ranges from snubs or adverse comments to rejection. When people are drunk or during family misunderstandings, the individuals are unintentionally stigmatised instead of being sympathised with. The experience of the eldest participant in the sample, abducted in her thirties for nine years, is illustrative:

I live with my old husband. He disturbs me when he is drunk that I should go back to my bush husband. He calls me a rebel. My son does the same when drunk. But my daughters support and do not stigmatise me. They respect me. Some of my in-laws also call me a rebel; and not mentally stable. This usually happens when we have a quarrel or some time when drunk. My family talking about my bush experience really hurts me. Even in the wider community, there is stigmatisation in this area. People say I am from the bush and not mentally sound.⁸²

Compared to the marital/conjugal home (stigmatisation as an obstacle to marriage is discussed in Chapter Seven) and wider community, stigmatisation in biological families (parents and siblings) remains low. Neighbours and friends resent and publically stigmatise the formerly abducted individuals. Twenty-four-year-old Irene's recollection of how she was rejected by some of her neighbours when she first returned to her community after three years with the LRA explains this point: people in my village made it really hard to live with them again. Some women told me

⁸¹Interview, CM55.

⁸²Interview, CM45.

not to associate with their family members, saying I could kill their children just like how I had been killing people in the bush. Such accusations pained me because I knew I could not hurt anybody.⁸³ It is not clear who among community members stigmatises the formerly abducted more—contemporaries or older people, males or females. One would imagine the elderly, particularly females, sympathise with the formerly abducted more, but this is not the case. Formerly abducted girls are harassed by their peers as well as the older women in their surroundings (see also Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiatives-ARLPI, 2002:19).

6.5 Stigmatisation as Hindrance to Reintegration

As discussed in this chapter, stigma in Acholi is manifested when discrimination, envy, labelling, rejection, exclusion and negative stereotyping processes unfold. Although stigmatisation was intense in the initial years of reintegration, even after a number of years being home, it continues to hinder the former girl soldiers' lives and social reintegration. Studies have shown that stigma affects social interactions (Harris *et al.*, 1992; Lennon *et al.*, 1989), self-esteem, and depression (Link, 1987). Stigmatisation also contributes to fewer positive opportunities and less access to protective resources such as community and sometimes family support (Link & Phelan, 2001, 2006). Studies also illustrate a risk for poor mental health outcomes among former child soldiers (see Derluynet *et al.*, 2004; Singer, 2005:194; Wessells, 2006; Kohnt *et al.*, 2008; Pfeiffer & Elbert, 2011; Bayer *et al.*, 2007), indicating that long-term psychosocial adjustment is influenced not only by past war experiences, but also by post-conflict factors like scarcity, vulnerability of their children, stigma process (discrimination and rejection), economic hardship and bleak future outlook, among others (see Horn, 2013:17).

Although stigmatisation reduces with time, some years after reintegrating, the participants are yet to completely overcome this hindrance. Most of them have been home for 6 to 10 years, but as Helen's case signifies (Table 6.1), they still face widespread stigmatisation, hindering their capacity to effectively relate with other people and engage in community activities (see also Gulu Support the Children Organization-GUSCO, 2010:17; Annan *et al.*, 2006). As already mentioned, because they are considered to be lacking discipline, or seen as violent and destructive people who cannot be trusted (even when there is no evidence to suggest so), the community marginalizes or simply overlooks the formerly abducted individuals.

⁸³Interview, CM7.

Also, as Helen's experience shows (Table 6.1), formerly abducted individuals feel a need to avoid engaging in community activities because they fear being stigmatised. Listening to negative responses being repeated over and over again strains their relationship with others, making them continuously unhappy and lowering their self-esteem. Because they are aware of their personal and social circumstances, they are keenly conscious when they are stigmatised in speech and action. Being branded with stigmatising labels like 'rebel' 'bush behaviour/mentality', 'mentally unstable', or 'evil spirit possessed', among others, along with finger-pointing and accusations, inflicts so much pain on them that, although they are not physically rejected and driven out of their villages, they are not fully accepted by others. This experience limits their participation in community activities that are meant to support their reintegration.

The literature considers acceptance at family and community levels as an important factor for successful reintegration. Complete acceptance and being free from stigmatisation was also described as an indicator of successful social reintegration in the interviews. Helen emphasised that, 'when a returnee is living a happy, normal life and people are kind to him/her, no longer experiences any form of stigma, that person will confidently say, "I have successfully reintegrated"'. But how can he/she say that when everyday people are rude, insulting and mocking him/her for no good reason? ...⁸⁴ Living peacefully with others, without people being unkind to them, they would then describe themselves as free and peaceful, with positive reintegration. However, as long as they are still greeted with rudeness and resentment on a daily basis, having a peaceful mindset, which is a pre-condition for a total healing process from all the sufferings endured while in captivity, remains unachievable. Instead, unkindness and stigma promotion rekindle the bad war memories for them. If the community members could be more kind and peaceful, this would facilitate their healing, forgetfulness of the past and progressive reintegration. The community is often expected to bring in (expose) the civil alternative to military life, but this can only be done through accepting and pardoning former child soldiers and not stigmatising them. According to the participants in FGDs, successful reintegration will happen only when formerly abducted persons stop paying much attention to stigmatization. They implied that returnees will always be stigmatized but how they react to it will determine how

⁸⁴Interview, CM 50, Lokung, November, 2012

well their social reintegration is progressing. One of them concluded this argument with the following remark.

...the way they [returnees] react when they are stigmatized will show if they are fitting well in the community or not. If they take [stigmatizing] comments lightly, it will show they are changing attitudes and moving on well. I remember in the days when they had just returned from the bush, they reacted with extreme violence. Some used to move around with panga or knife [machete] and if you stigmatized them, they would physically attack you. This is changing and it shows they are moving away from their bush mentality....⁸⁵

People cannot afford to continue living in the past, using formerly abducted individuals as scapegoats: the important thing that I want to tell you in this meeting [interview] is that, it was not our [formerly abducted persons] choice to be abducted. People behave as if they don't know that. The government should sensitize people in the communities so that they stop stigmatizing us...⁸⁶ There is great need for people living with such individuals to avoid stigma promotion and instead encourage direct positive thoughts and friendly attitudes toward them. Currently, the relationships between them and the community is one way where the former abductees live cautiously and on guard so that their reactions and actions are accepted by their friends and neighbours. Anger, aggressive or simply expressive behaviour can easily be interpreted as signs of 'bush behaviour'. They are cautious and concerned about how their responses to stigmatisation will be judged. Interviews also show that former abductees in a sense help to maintain the wall that divides them from other people. Due to their suspicion that a non-abductee will always see them as 'evil', 'disgraceful' and 'inferior', they often seem to look out for evidence that will confirm this mistrust. In some cases, because of fear of being hated and stigmatized, formerly abducted people find themselves building walls that separate them from other people:

...there are some neighbours who talk to me but I know they are not happy I returned home. For example, there is one family whose child was abducted after me but was later shot by the UPDF. The Mother and the other family members got the report of their son's death, way before I returned home. When I came back home, the mother and other people again began asking me if indeed their son had died in captivity. I confirmed with them that he had died. I feel they do not like the fact that I returned home safe and their

⁸⁵ Participant, FGD03

⁸⁶ Interview, CM 30

son did not. I am very cautious with that family and other people in this village; I don't mingle a lot with them.⁸⁷

As already noted in this chapter, to respond to stigmatisation, some of them simply ignore their stigmatisers. They often react meekly rather than aggressively and avoid confrontations (see also Annan *et al.*, 2011:25; Annan *et al.*, 2009). Few said that when it gets worse and they fear for their lives or being judged for exercising their 'bush mentality', they simply report their stigmatisers to local authorities rather than standing up to them: I am a peaceful person. If someone tries to provoke me with insults, asking for a fight or quarrel, I keep quiet or will simply go to the local leader so that the community does not say that I am offensive because I was in the bush, and I have the bush mentality⁸⁸—thus, a 28-year-old Akumu abducted at the age of 9 for nine years explained this vulnerable position that many of the returnees find themselves in. But as we have seen from Helen's experience (Table, 6.1), reporting their stigmatizers to the local authorities does not help address their predicament either.

Many participants said silence was the best way to respond to stigmatisation; however, silence as a coping method can also be easily misunderstood by people around them. As Beatrice's circumstances demonstrate, silence exposes someone to more dilemma and torment: at times I just sit here [at the door step] in silence. Then my neighbours will start saying that, now the *cen* has come upon her; she might harm people', yet I am even thinking about something different from what they are talking about.⁸⁹ Although silence may be naturally associated with calmness and peace of mind, in reference to abductees, it can be also interpreted by others as being mentally disturbed or harbouring evil spirits. Beatrice's circumstances illustrate that retreating into silence cannot protect this category of women either. Apart from silence, as the case for Helen (Table, 6.1), some of them still seek solace in isolation as a means to escape being stigmatised. Confined to their families, they stay away from communal gatherings or events that will bring them close to other people. For example, 20-year-old Aciro, ten years in abduction, relies on isolation to cope with stigma. She only leaves her father's compound on Sundays for prayers. To avoid mixing with people who know her past, she does not attend the village church, but walks for almost two hours to Kitgum town. These women are trapped in experiencing

⁸⁷ Interview, CM 06

⁸⁸ Interview, CM40, Kitgum town.

⁸⁹ Interview 48.

resentment and further unsympathetic, insensitive treatment, and retreating into isolation, which widens the separation between them and the non-abductees. Although relying on these strategies (secrecy, silence, and isolation) can to some extent protect them from stigmatisation, these strategies can easily be manipulated by their stigmatisers. If responding to stigmatisation aggressively is seen as confirming the *bush mentality*, and with silence and isolation as being mentally unstable, possessed by *cen* or anti-social, the women are left with no effective coping strategies, and at the mercy of their stigmatisers.

Because they are aware of the negative meanings that people associate with their past, each additional resentful comment, slander, or demeaning reaction from their families, friends and neighbours simply reinforces this belief. Even if many of them have been home for several years, each negative encounter is a painful reminder of how they and their past are devalued. Also, this sends a message to them that however much time they spend in the community, how well they endeavour to live with non-abductees, this awful treatment is not about to stop. Thus some of them try to live with stigma by ignoring their stigmatisers.

6.6 Concluding Remarks

Chapter Six has discussed participant experiences of abduction, life in captivity and eventual exit from incarceration. It shows that stigmatisation is a persistent challenge facing the formerly abducted girls in northern Uganda. It is still widespread at household and community levels, hindering individual attempts to genuinely relate with other people. This persistent stigmatisation affects returnees' social relationships and reduces their life chances. However, to advance their reintegration, many still attempt to engage in community initiatives like marriage and livelihoods. We now turn, in Chapter 7, to their attempts and experiences of engaging in marriage and show how stigmatisation and other factors affect these attempts to participate in this important institution.

CHAPTER SEVEN

REINTEGRATION AND REALITIES OF MARRIAGE

As a cultural determinant of successful reintegration, marriage was a recurring issue in the interviews. Getting into and sustaining a marriage is viewed by the participants as a sign of a progressive reintegration. However, this remains a challenge for most formerly abducted girls. The central argument here is that the challenges and frustrations confronting their marriage aspirations are beyond their direct war participation, emerging from multiple influences including traditions, families and the general public.

7.1 The Role of Marriage in Acholi

Keesing (1981:252) defines marriage as an institution which legitimates sexual relations and parentage; ...it defines the social position of individuals and their memberships in groups; it establishes legal rights and interests; it creates domestic economic units; it relates individuals to kin groups other than their own... This definition is important for analysing the marriage institution in Acholi. It describes issues and aspects of marriage that apply and affect the participants. For the present purposes, marriage is defined as formal union accepted by the Acholi community to be marriage, exclusive of courtship, dating and any other loose partnerships.

Marriage is an initiation from *wang-tino* (childhood) to maturity. According to Acholi tradition, an unmarried person is still a child no matter how old she or he may be. Marriage status is still such an important aspect of an individual's socialisation (recognition, respect, pride) and well-being. There is tremendous pressure to get married, both for females and males of marriageable age. A bachelor and spinster have no room in this culture. The unmarried young adults are disfavoured and stereotyped as incomplete, unserious, irresponsible and unable to effectively execute their allocated roles (Finnstrom, 2008:235; Dolan, 2005:282). However old an individual may be, as long as he or she remains unmarried, their presence and voice will in most cases be ignored or overlooked. The late p'Bitek (1966) puts it precisely: you might be a giant of a man, you may begin to grow grey hair, you may be old and toothless with age, but if you are unmarried, you are nothing. Conversely, because they have children and run homes, all married adults are perceived to be responsible, respectful and reliable (Dolan, 2005:282). With this

stereotyping, the unmarried youth find it hard to have their concerns considered and urgently met. Their participation in social, economic and political life is also limited (ibid.).

Beyond an individual understanding, marriage is a significant aspect whose central role is to unify *kaka* (‘clans’) and control procreation (see Girling, 1960; Artkinson, 1994). Marriages are patrilineal and patrilocal (Girling, 1960:21; Baines &Gauvin, 2014:287). When *nyaka* (‘a girl’) gets married, she joins and becomes part of her husband’s clan. Through this union and transfer, she gains a place in that family and community as a woman and mother. Apart from marriage defining an individual’s ability and status in the community, it is one of the most important institutions of support for formerly abducted and other young women (see also Justice and Reconciliation Project-JRP, 2006). As discussed in Chapter Eight, when a woman partners with a man in a *formal* marriage, she achieves a right to access family resources (land for farming, livestock). Marriage is social security, which for some women may only be gained from such association. Also, apart from representing a principle basis of respect, self-esteem and pride, with an unmarried woman experiencing limitations, isolation and stigmatisation in the community, marriage provides a woman the freedom to function as an accepted member of the wider society, which is considerably limited for an unmarried female of marriageable age.

7.2 Customary Marriage: The Significance of *Otongo-keny* (‘Bride Price’)

Achieving Acholi customary marriage is a lengthy procedure which starts with a young man meeting and identifying a potential girl and going on to pursue her for marriage (see also Baines &Gauvin, 2014:189; Porter, 2013). In the past, to meet girls to marry, young men commonly relied on traditional courtship dances, community gatherings and places where water and firewood or mushrooms were gathered (p’Bitek, 1967; Girling, 1960:68). However, today this selection tradition is waning because communal events like dancing seasons where men targeted meeting girls are no longer common in the villages. Instead, young men meet and select girls for marriage from schools, churches or market places; for example, most of the participants met their husbands in IDP camps or village markets.

In theory, when a young man has identified a girl to marry, he alerts his family and clan members who approach the girl’s family to ask her hand in marriage and to agree on the sufficient *otongo-keny* (see Baines &Gauvin, 2014:189). The important issue here is the agreement and promise to pay the assigned bride price. As in most African societies (see Goody,

1973; Anderson, 2007; Mwamwenda&Monyooe, 1997; Obeneba-Sakyi&Takyi, 2006; Wojcicki et al., 2010), paying bride price is still common in Acholi. In fact, most Ugandan ethnic groups still consider bride price as a significant practice for authenticating a customary marriage (see Hague *et al.*, 2011). With the groom's family paying bride price in exchange for the woman's reproductive and productive value, Acholi families hope to gain from this marriage practice. Bride price typically consists of livestock, household items, foodstuffs, iron objects and money. The value depends on the status of the girl; for example, whether educated or not (Justice & Reconciliation Project, 2006). However, traditionally, reasonable *otongo-keny* should include cattle (see Girling, 1960:71).

During the bride price negotiations, the bride to be is not consulted. Also, the girl does not directly benefit from whatever is given to her family as bride price. The materials or money are saved to offset the bride price levied on one of her brothers when it is his turn to marry (see also Justice & Reconciliation Project, 2006). However, due to poverty, bride price today comes in handy as a support to the rest of the family. While she is not consulted when her bride price is negotiated upon and does not benefit from it, she is aware of the consequences of defaulting on this practice. Without her husband completing the agreed *otongo-keny*, her family are likely to force her to abandon the man and the marriage. This is a big concern because, instead of focusing on the values of compatibility, an individual girl is now forced to consider the man's economic condition first. This is to ensure that he can afford to complete the required bride price and offer extra support to her family in the long run.

When the bride price negotiations are completed and the first instalment is paid, the couple is considered engaged and the young man takes the girl to his home—Girling (1960:21, 72) calls this stage of customary marriage *_cohabitation_*. The couple can be engaged or cohabiting for a while and up on the final completion of bride price payment, the bride's status changes from *nyako*(girl) to *dako-ot* (*_house wife_*). Completing the bride price serves to finally sign a contract of marriage between the couple and their families/clans (see also Baines &Gauvin, 2014:189). Until this custom is fulfilled, the woman and children formally belong to her *kaka* and the husband has limited rights to dominate the welfare of his household.

While full payment of bride price enables a girl to become a housewife, her status and position in her husband's family and community is made permanent after giving birth. Procreation is the

ultimate goal of marriage and a way of extending Acholi practices and values to the next generation. Therefore, marriage is confirmed with the birth of the first child (Girling, 1960:21, 72; p'Bitek 1973:52; p'Bitek, 1966:105; Ocitti, 1973:27–8; Baines & Gauvin, 2014:287). Traditionally, paying full bride price implies that the man's clan has established a right to a productive womb in the woman's family' and a couple's inability to produce is typically blamed on the woman (Girling, 1960:72). Because children are highly prized and giving birth within a marriage remains so significant, the barren and impotent are considered cursed and in need of cleansing.

Until the birth of the first child, the newlywed young woman sleeps in the husband's *ot* (pl. *odi*—hut/house') but continues to share domestic items and fireplace with her mother- and sisters-in-law. Here, the mother in-law treats her as one of her daughters, watching and teaching her how to be a wife. After giving birth, the couple moves into their own *ot*, where the *dako-ot* now becomes the *min ot* (literally, hut mother'). With this accomplishment and establishment, the young woman stops being a menial assistant to the mother-in-law and becomes the owner of the household, with her own *poto* (garden), granary and cooking hut (see also Girling, 1960:21, 72). Being formally married is therefore a huge achievement, and this explains why the participants referred to *being married* as having a home—my home' as opposed to our home', meaning the parental home. When a female reaches marriageable age, she is expected to leave her mother's home' and look for her own home' (get married). With this accomplishment, a woman's position, social role, identity and right as a wife and mother in the society are established (see also Baines & Gauvin, 2014:189).

The above discussed process of formally getting married in Acholi is not limited to formerly abducted girls. All females have to go through these procedures as they attempt to achieve a formal marriage. We have also seen that customary marriage in Acholi can be in two forms: fixed marriage (bride price completed) and cohabitation (instalment(s) of bride price paid: this marriage may be acknowledged by the community over time or not). However, as discussed later in this chapter, there is a shift from fixed customary unions towards cohabitation and other loose forms of marriage, including single parenthood and elopements. For instance, only two participants, both still married to their LRA husbands, had their bride price completed at the time of fieldwork. The rest were/are either in cohabitation, elopement marriages or practising single

parenthood living. Of these, the majority are/were eloping: *elopements* are sexual relationships where a girl lives with her partner without him paying any instalment of the customary bride price to receive their parents' marriage blessings (see also Justice & Reconciliation Project, 2006). The study treats the two participants mentioned as having achieved legal marriages and the rest as having failed to secure culturally acceptable marriages at the time of interviews.

7.3 Early Marriage, Sexual Activity and 'Child Mothers'

Apart from sharing early motherhood experiences, former girl abductees and their non-abducted peers end up in comparable situations when it comes to the kinds of marriages they accomplish. For both categories, the motivations to remarry, and the obstacles and dilemmas they encounter in those marriages, are in most cases similar. Although the chapter seeks to examine the particular marriage realities for former girl abductees, to understand the situation in which they find themselves, marriage is and should be situated in the local/regional landscape and in the context of social change.

Since most of the participants gave birth before they were 18, this section is concerned with the occurrence of females giving birth in their adolescent years in Acholi. During the war, apart from the abductions, many adolescent girls engaged in sexual relationships, were raped in the camps or were forced into early marriages (see Women's Commission, 2001; Okello&Hovil, 2007; Akumu *et al.*, 2005; Isis-WICCE, 2006; Liebling *et al.*, 2008). This was reflected in the FGDs with the young women: apart from the unplanned pregnancy mothers, most of them were rape survivors and forced mothers/wives. When former girl soldiers exited the LRA, they became part of this category of women or females (child mothers/young women) in Acholi districts. A child mother can be living with her partner (impregnator), parents or alone. The important factor here is giving birth at a young age and before one is rightfully married. The realities of the lives of abductee child mothers will therefore be analysed in comparison with other child mothers.

It is important to recognise that child mothers in the context of the LRA have been, to some extent, treated as an isolated phenomenon in Uganda (Allen & Schomerus, 2006). However, this is not the case, because child mothers did not start with the LRA in the northern part of the country. When the notion of child mother is cast in the wider context of early marriage and pregnancy in Uganda (the age of consent at marriage is 18), a history of adolescents engaging in

sexual relationships and child motherhood emerges. A household survey carried out in 1995 showed that 43 per cent of teenagers in the 15–19 age bracket either were mothers or were pregnant with their first child. In 2000–2001, this had however declined to 31 per cent with the median age at first birth standing at around 18.5 (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2001:48). Although the 2006 and 2011 Demographic Health Surveys show that the fertility rate for the same age bracket (15–19) has considerably decreased, early marriage and pregnancies among adolescent and teenagers remain high in the country. With the majority Ugandans below the age of 30, apart from Uganda facing significant challenges in meeting young people’s needs, it faces the problem of an adolescent and teenage pregnancy rate of 24 per cent and increasing (Uganda Population Report, (2013:52). Consequently, early marriage and pregnancies remain a big threat to Uganda’s girl children (Daily Monitor, July 11, 2013; New Vision, 2012).

In Acholi, Adolescent pregnancy is a rising concern that provides clear evidence of sexual activity among very young people (see also Women’s Commission, 2001; Schlecht, *et al.*, 2013). It is apparent that this raises moral issues that many people find uncomfortable. Traditionally, when both male and female youth were in their early to mid-20s, following a lengthy engagement and/or cohabiting, they got married. However, this is changing. The practice of girls and boys engaging in sex and marriage at a much younger age escalated during the war and has continued in the aftermath (see Schlecht *et al.*, 2013).

Research suggests four major reasons why adolescents may engage in early sexual activity or marriage in any society:

- 1) Out of a wish to escape abusive or/and chaotic surroundings: to create a different family and environment, adolescents may be forced to engage in sexual activities (see Beers & Hollo, 2009). In a study of school-age mothers, Horwitz *et al.* (1991) argue that, due to emotional deprivation, adolescents may need to fulfill missed intimacy through early sexual relationships that could lead to early pregnancies.
- 2) Early sexualisation behaviour, initiation and promiscuity expose adolescents to sexualactivity in the short and long run.
- 3) Exposure to all kinds of abuse increases the likelihood of engaging in sexual intercourse (see Black *et al.*, 2009). History of abuse leads to low self-esteem, difficult behaviour

and/or initiation into anti-social behaviour peer groups (Kaplan *et al.*, 1979; Madigan *et al.*, 2014).

- 4) High poverty rates (United Nations Population Fund, 2012; World Vision, 2013; Refugee Law Project, 2007; UNICEF, 2005; International Center for Research on Women, 2006a; etc.).

All these reasons can be related to the Acholi situation: poverty, dysfunctional family conditions and cultural erosion have increased young girls' vulnerability to engaging in early sexual activities and further abuse. Although early pregnancies can be associated with lack of basic sexual and reproductive health education and access to affordable contraceptive options, among other factors, findings show that scarcity/poverty forces girls to engage in early sexual activities and marriage. Poverty is also responsible for the increasing child prostitution in the region (see Rodriguez, 2014). Parents reported that poverty drives their adolescent girls to engage in early sexual relationships and marriages, an occurrence that affects not only the girls, but their parents as well. Being unable to provide for the girls and protect them from early sexualisation leaves the parents in a helpless position, as two of them expressed in a group discussion:

...as a parent, I see a problem with our children these days. This kind of marriage that they go into when they are not prepared for it is not right. Most of these children go to pubs and dancing clubs and from there, because of their material needs, they feel they should marry that man they have just met, even if they do not know him at all, whether he is HIV/AIDS free or not. Generally, the family poverty will send away your daughter to look for a well-to-do man and when they get a problem from there [elopement], they again run back to you with their children and this is very bad and oppressing us, as parents.⁹⁰

For a young girl of 14 to 15 years to go for an early marriage, to us parents, that is like losing her to death. It is likely that when she conceives, because she is not strong enough to deliver a child, she will end up in hospital seeking operations that could lead to her death. This [death or operations] brings you [parent] more problems, yet your child should have stayed at home with you. It is simply sad...⁹¹

Cultural degradation and erosion that started in the camps and progressed to the community has opened up windows for adolescent and teenage girls to engage in sexual activities and become child mothers. This can be linked to the fact that some of the adolescents are orphans, growing

⁹⁰ Respondent, FGD01, Community Members, Kitgum town

⁹¹ Respondent, FGD01, Community Members, Kitgum town

up with no solid source of advice on sex education, marriage and life in general. Traditionally, a girl lived under firm ethical household codes with brothers and parents ensuring she was not taken out by boys to engage in illicit sexual intercourse (see Southall, 1960). However, this is not to suggest that in the past, there was no illicit sexual intercourse that could have resulted in unwanted pregnancies. For example, in the process of courtship, it was common for a girl, before committing herself to a young man for marriage, to spend a night with him in his bachelor hut just to be certain he was sexually all right (see Girling, 1960:69; P'Bitek, 1964). Actually, Girling (1960:69) writes that *'there seems little doubt that in the past, as today, intercourse took place before marriage, and a child born to an unmarried girl is usually described as anywal-kiototogo, conceived in the bachelor hut'*. But if a girl was caught having sex with a man who did not intend to marry her, she was punished by heavy beating (p'Bitek, 1964).

The war and displacement weakened such protective family ties; family relations, social roles, and Acholi culture in general (Okello&Hovil, 2007). The camp system affected rural families and the extensive kin networks that Acholi culture relied on to educate and discipline its adolescents and teenagers:

...within the internally displaced persons' (IDP) camps, mothers, fathers, aunts and uncles were no longer able to perform their familial roles as providers, disciplinarians, and heads of households; daughters and sons no longer had traditional responsibilities, moral obligations, and dependence on the familial social structure; and all forms of familial relations were put under extreme strain by violence, insecurity, immobility, lack of productivity and poverty (Baines &Gauvin, 2014:283)

Dysfunctional families, reduced strictness and weakened moral codes have left the parents/families unable to enforce the cultural norms on sex or provide appropriate guidance/counsel and protection to their children. Life in the camps reduced their authority and power to effectively execute such important roles (Baines &Gauvin, 2014:289). With their children increasingly becoming disrespectful to their parents, a moral gap between the two has been created: *'children blame their parents for failing to provide for and protect them (their rights as children), and parents complain that children no longer respect them and are disobedient'* (Cheney, 2007:199). With respect and obedience for parents and elders as the two significant markers of an ideal Acholi childhood identity, their scarcity causes a moral challenge. Due to dysfunctional families, troubled relationships between parents and children, and

hostile/insecure environments, individual adolescents and teenagers have taken on the decisions of how to live, survive and deal with delicate matters like meeting their intimate concerns.

7.3.1 Child Marriage

The other factor causing early motherhood in northern Uganda is forced child marriages (see Isis-WICCE, 2001; Women's Commission, 2001). Since 1948, the UN, international agencies and nations have attempted to end child marriage, but their efforts have not stopped this global practice. In 1989, at the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the international law defining children as persons below the age 18 years was established (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, Article 1). With this convention, any country that allowed child marriage (legal age for marriage set at 18) would be committing a violation of human rights. Article 16(2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares that individuals must be at full age when entering a marriage and this union should be started on the basis of free will and with full consent.⁹² The 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is also against child marriages and considers the practice illegal (Convention of Women, 1979, Article 16). Although many nations including Uganda have subscribed to these international laws, the law has not been extensively executed and many girls are still forced into taking on marriages before their 18th birthdays (see UN-Population Fund, 2005, 2012; Mathur *et al.*, 2003; Bruce, 2003).

Although engaging in premarital sexual activities is increasing (Wellings *et al.*, 2006), the age of women at marriage is increasing in almost every developing country (see Dyson, 2010:174; Shapiro & Gebreselassie, 2014; Khan & Mishra, 2008). This is true in Acholi. Due to improved education for girl children in Uganda, there is a desire for families to have their daughters educated. Although this is still for marriage prospects (an educated girl fetches an enhanced bride price), an extra year in school keeps a girl away from early marriage or engaging in sexual activities (see UN-Population Fund, 2012; Center for Research on Women, 2006a; Mathur *et al.*, 2003; Mensch *et al.*, 1998; Gupta *et al.*, 2008). Formal schooling has been suggested as the solution to early marriage (forced or not): delays in age at marriage are influenced by additional years in school, school attendance takes girls out of the domestic environment, and improved literacy and education help them possess ideas and values that may compete with traditional

⁹²<http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>

customs and livelihoods offered in early marriage (see Westoff, 1992:7; Shapiro & Tambashe, 2003; Shapiro & Gebreselassie, 2014).

With a low number of girls entering secondary education (Annan *et al.*, 2008), underage girls, particularly in remote villages, are still denied education and forced to take on domestic work or get married. Although most early motherhood experiences seem to be as a result of illicit sexual relationships and not forced marriages, a girl being persuaded into starting a marriage is still common in Acholi. A girl becomes a ‘forced’ mother/wife after being challenged and pressurised into marrying a man her family identifies as suitable (fairly economically well off) or finding herself any man who will afford bride price (see also Isis-WICCE, 2001:45). This brings us back to widespread household poverty. Girls are seen as a source of money that could offset the family’s constrained financial situations:

This marriage that has not been prepared for is not good. At times the girl’s parents have money problems and will tell you [their daughter] that, ‘you have grown up and you should go and look for *your home*; I am feeding you for nothing, go and bring for me money’. And this will irritate the girl and she will decide that, ‘I am being insulted for nothing, let me go to *my home*’. She might get a child from there and when the marriage fails, she comes back home. This will again increase her problem at home.⁹³

Forced marriage in this case is not coupling a girl with a man who is not of her choice (as was the case in the LRA), but being ‘forced’ to leave her parents’ home to start ‘her home’ before she is of appropriate age or simply ready for marriage. Such actions by family members, particularly fathers and male siblings, are motivated by the desire for money and other material factors and not the fact that she is too old to be at home. Laker (aged 16, one of the non child mothers who participated in one of the FGDs, no abduction past) shared her struggle of resisting early marriage. She stood up to her family’s pressure to get married in favour of education. Meeting her own needs, she had completed grade seven at the time of our interviews:

...It all started with my eldest brother wanting me to get married. I told him how I knew many young women suffering out there because they abandoned school and ended up as single mothers. I pleaded with him to let me continue with school but in vain. He caned and insulted me a lot. I reported the matter to my mother [alcoholic] who ended up siding with my brother on the matter. She reasoned that I never wanted to get married so I might misbehave with bad boys in the village. I was so angered when she asked my father [separated from the mother] to put more pressure on me in order to get married. I still

⁹³ Participant in FGD01, Young Women, Kitgum town

refused. If I was not a confident girl who loves school, I would be married now because of the disturbances I received from some of my family members...⁹⁴

The women leaders interviewed for this study pinned the early motherhood trend on the war and camp system that have left parents devastated by the absolute poverty. There was a general feeling among them and other community members that early marriage is a bad practice and they sympathised with young girls who are often pressured into them. However, their sympathy is contrary to Acholi cultural marriage norms. As noted in Chapter 5, traditionally, a girl became marriageable in her early adolescent years, between 12 and 16 years (Girling, 1960:27), making child marriage an old phenomenon. This history seems to correlate with the provisions for age of consent in customary marriage arrangements in Uganda: Section 11 provides that *customary marriage shall be void if (a) the female party to it has not attained the age of sixteen years; (b) the male party to it has not attained the age of eighteen years* (The Customary Marriage (Registration) Act 1973, Chapter 248, emphasis added).⁹⁵ With the age of parental consent standing at 16, the customary marriage arrangement is contrary to the 1995 Constitution of Uganda. The constitution, Article 31(1), provides that *men and women of the age of eighteen years and above have the right to marry and to found a family and are entitled to equal rights in marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution* (Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995). Here, marriage consent is at the age of 18 (for both parents and marrying parties).

7.3.2 Experiences of Child Mothers: Stigmatisation and Scarcity

Unmarried child mothers in Acholi are considered to be personally responsible for their fate. They are believed to have consciously chosen not to act in a culturally accepted manner and are liable to stigmatisation. They are despised and scorned for being irresponsible, spoilt girls who misused their education opportunities to engage in early sex. However, for many non-abducted child mothers, given their family backgrounds and financial circumstances, it does not appear that their future opportunities would have necessarily improved if they had deferred sex, motherhood and marriage beyond teenage years. In addition, others are rape victims who are also perceived to be blameworthy. Although early motherhood increases their dependence as single mothers on other people, having a child or marriage gives many of them a responsibility for looking after another person and grants them some levels of stability as women and mothers.

⁹⁴ Participant in FGD03, Young Women, Lukung

⁹⁵ <http://www.ulii.org/ug/legislation/consolidated-act/248>.

Engaging in sexual intercourse and getting pregnant before one is married is seen as betraying and shaming the family. Some are chased away to find their ‘impregnators’ who are at times too young or poor to sustain a family. The child mothers who are allowed to stay with their parents are neglected and/or deprived of food: for example, one respondent (no abduction past) reported that while she was pregnant, she was denied food because she had not participated in its production and processing. When their children are sick, some of them are not given support:

...when a young girl, say at the age of 13 gets pregnant, her parents feel betrayed by their daughter. She is accused of betraying the family trust, embarrassing the family and is told to find her own home with the man who impregnated her. But in most cases, the responsible men reject such pregnancies, leaving the parents thinking they won't benefit much out of their daughter. For this, they become disrespectful to the young mother and often insult her in different ways or/and punish her by denying her basic needs. Her child will also suffer in the process...⁹⁶

Rape victims are not spared either:

When community members learn that a girl got raped, they highly stigmatise her and make her feel very dejected. She will want to lock herself behind closed doors or never move around to avoid people talking bad about what happened to her. This is bad for the healing process of such girls because rapes happen against their will⁹⁷

Some community members will never believe that the rape happened against a girl's will. They will insist that she should be married to the perpetrator. She will surely be forced into marrying the man on claims that it is useless for her to continue living in that homestead.⁹⁸

Due to stigmatisation, lack of support and contempt drive many of the child mothers to desperate measures like moving in with the men responsible for their pregnancy in the hope of securing a marriage: ‘pregnant girls feel betrayed when the parents are able to provide for them but refuse to do so. Human needs vary among girls in that state. The urge to meet them where they have not been provided drives them to opt for early marriages in quests to have their needs met.’⁹⁹ Evidence however shows that, in most cases, this does not last or result in the desired customary marriage. In some cases, such men have their wives and are not interested in long term commitment to an individual child mother: ‘some of the old men still go to the child mothers knowing they are young and probably made a mistake with their first pregnancies. These men do

⁹⁶Participant FGD03, Young women, Lokung.

⁹⁷Participant FGD03.

⁹⁸Participant FGD03, Young women, Lokung.

⁹⁹ Participant, FGD03

not love these child mothers but simply want to satisfy themselves sexually'.¹⁰⁰ Unable to secure a marriage with the men responsible for their pregnancy, and with stigma and harassment at their parents' homes, young women are left with one option, living by themselves as single child mothers:

I feel that for my case, if my father and brothers had not chased me from home, there is no way I could think of looking for a house to rent because for a girl to start renting, it will again spoil your image, and men will be coming to you and you will end up conceiving again. But I had nothing to do, whatever they tell me, I feel I should follow what they want.¹⁰¹

Although staying alone can be an option for the child mother, single parenthood has its own social and economic hardships that force them to engage in loose marriages. Child mothers are likely to be associated with these informal unions.

7.4 Rising Cohabitation, Elopement and Single Motherhood Marriages

War and displacement affect the formal marriage system of a society (see Schlecht *et al.*, 2013). While the traditional ways in which people marry in Acholi continue to be valued, for many they cannot be practiced any more. Generally, marriage as a key mechanism for creating social cohesion is felt to be changing significantly (see also Dolan, 2005:290). Forced marriages, elopements, divorce and single parenthood living are considerably higher than before the war (see Justice and Reconciliation Project, 2006; Bailey, 2009:19; Rodrigez, 2006; Schlecht *et al.*, 2013). After the war, society was disrupted, with insecurity, displacement, extreme poverty, migration, modernisation, intermarriage, and education, among others, said to be responsible for this change.

A once highly respected institution with its strict codes of social and sexual behavior is shifting to more dysfunctional and loose marriage-like situations. From being a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood, marriage appears to be undergoing a significant change and approaches to it shifting from a basic social cohesion unit to a commercialised, loose and unstable institution (see Dolan, 2005:292). It is also increasingly detaching from lineage control and becoming more of a single family and individualistic endeavour. This is the confusion and marriage position faced by former child abductees and other youth who matured in the camps.

¹⁰⁰ Participant, FGD02 Kitgum town centre, 20/11/2012

¹⁰¹ Respondent, FGD01, Young Women, Kitgum town

Growing up with a new outlook to marriage and life, and unable to meet marriage expectations¹⁰², child mothers and other youth are taking advantage of the emerging marriage changes to ensure that they too can participate in this important institution. They target cohabitation and elopement marriages that are becoming 'normal' and popular (see Schlecht *et al.*, 2013). When such unions fail, the young women settle for single parenthood. Although traditional values continue to prohibit these loose marriage provisions, the weakening clan system, inability to pay bride price, higher numbers of marriageable age women, among other factors, are contributing to this popularity.

7.4.1 Family Breakdown and Weakening of clan structure

Habitually, a clan and its member families have played crucial roles in the life of an individual and in establishing new marriages (Girling, 1960:71). A young man depended upon his lineage heads and elders for consent to marry and settle the bride price. Elders of the girl's lineage were also heavily involved in decision making and negotiations surrounding marriage (*ibid.*). However, following the lengthy war and camp system, the high death rates, high levels of poverty, commercialisation of marriage and individualistic tendencies towards life, among others, have dismantled this assurance. The connectivity and dependency of families and individuals on the clans has been disrupted (see also Schlecht *et al.*, 2013; Bailey, 2009). Many people lost lives through the fighting, camps and abduction which has reduced the number of people in families. Today, loss of parents characterises some of the families that make up clans. Therefore, with fewer people in the families that are supposed to constitute a clan within a village, they cannot be as effective as they were before the war broke out in the region (see Girling, 1960; Atkinson, 1994).

Furthermore, the scarce wealth among clan families leaves them unable to coordinate and run economic and social clan priorities. As discussed in Chapter Four, prior to the war, many families and clans held wealth in the form of livestock alongside their agricultural produce. However, this economic guarantee was largely affected by the war, cattle rustling and raiding.

¹⁰² Regardless of the observable changes and shifts in this institution, women and men are still expected to continue carrying out their roles in marriage even if they are unable to fully fulfil them. Normally, a father is still viewed as the head of the family and is responsible for its economic, social, political and legal well-being. A mother is still responsible for running and managing the day-to-day survival of the household. She is seen as a great contributor to the family through child bearing, domestic and farming services.

With displacement from their land and means of production, the clan elders lost social control, clan authority and power (Baines & Gauvin, 2014:288). Due to high poverty rates, clan elders and other clan members are becoming more preoccupied with taking care of their individual families and less concerned about what is going on in the clan families in general. This has left the clans' grip loosened and is becoming continually more difficult to effectively execute marriage issues for their children as before (Schlecht *et al.*, 2013). With many parents increasingly becoming isolated from their children and elders rarely getting involved in marriage decisions, family or individual independence in marriage decisions is inevitable. It is now common for families or simply an individual young adult to make a marriage choice and settle with a man or woman without consulting his or her clan elders (see also Dolan, 2005:292). This was observable among the participants. Some of them had got away with elopement marriages. They had been in such marriages for years without their parents or clan elders forcing them to leave. Some women switched from one marriage to another without worrying about how the clan elders would respond.

7.4.2 Unaffordable Bride Price

In addition to the above mentioned changes and challenges facing the marriage institution, cohabitation and elopement marriages are becoming common because bride price is becoming a commercialised practice. Due to acute poverty, this tradition is shifting from being simply a token of appreciation to a girl's family to a source of financial gain, with her family hoping to earn as much money and materials from her marriage as possible (see also Bailey, 2009:23). Because of fear of losing out on the bride price, families often demand a man to pay it before a young woman gives birth or stays with him for a long time: *just a day after leaving home, the parents come demanding for bride price, arguing that allowing you [girl] to stay in your marriage long enough, they will not get that much out of you. This is pure greed for money driving many young women to preventable sufferings*.¹⁰³

Bride price is, however, unaffordable for the young men where most of them are poor, uneducated, untrained and unemployable (Dolan, 2005:290; Schlecht *et al.*, 2013; International Alert, 2013). Apart from absence of bride price portraying the man's *unmarried* woman as lacking virtue, failure to pay bride price lays the men open to accusations and stigma for not

¹⁰³ Participant in FGD, Young Women, Lokung

living up to masculine ideals (see Schlecht *et al.*, 2013). Seen as not honouring the woman and her family, her father or brothers may practically force her to desert this kind of *disrespectful* man. For example, two participants had been ordered back home by their parents because, a year after eloping, their partners had failed to make any instalment payment towards the women's *otongo-keny*. These women described their positions as *not married* because they were not sure if their partners would pay the highly respected bride price and take them to *their homes*. This is not to suggest that before the war bride price was cheap and affordable by every young man. Girling (1960:70) writes that it was common for a young man to fail to raise the right amount of bride price for the desired girl. Such men were described as *limoloye*, *he was conquered by the bride wealth*. However, today, with no cattle or any form of assets to generate income, it is easier for a young man to be a *limoloye* and left to engage in casual relationships and loose marriage-like situations.

All this has consequences for the institution of marriage because, unable to afford the levied bride price, the young men resort to not taking girls and young women as their wives, but rather as passing flings. There is limited commitment to the union and, when the pressure for bride price mounts, some of them may find it easier to simply walk away from the women. Two other women in the sample had been simply abandoned by their partners. One of the men had moved in with another woman and the whereabouts of the other were unknown to the participant. When this happens, women are left in marriage limbo, taking care of the children, meeting all the domestic bills and waiting for the return of their men.

It is hard to determine if men who approach this category of women for marriage feel they can get away without paying bride price. However, this is unlikely because men are aware that bearing a child with a woman they have not officially married increases their bride price yoke. When he decides to officially marry her, he will not only pay bride price but also the child's *luk*(the fine for illicit sexual intercourse). Further, should any calamity such as death befall the woman or the child, the man may still have to clear the bride price and/or *kwoo* (compensation for the loss of the child) (see Girling, 1960:70). So it should not be assumed that young men are unaware of the consequences of postponing or overlooking bride price, but considering the lowly men these women end up with—poor backgrounds, illiterate, no stable income, alcoholic,

abusive, etc.—it will be simplistic to conclude that men do not want to fulfil this marriage custom.

7.4.3 High Male Death Rates

The other factor contributing to high rates of loose marriages among the child mothers is the possibility that young females of marital age currently outnumber young men (see also Bailey, 2009:20). Due to unavailable demographic information, this is based on an assumption that boys and young men were heavily recruited into the LRA and the government local defence units. Also, boys and young men were more likely to be killed in fighting, while protecting their families, or in the IDP camps. Thus, more male teenagers are likely have lost their lives compared to females. If these assumptions stand, such demographic changes are affecting the numbers of marriageable women, causing an excess supply of potential wives.

In the marriage context, child mothers have to compete with ‘true’ Acholi girls (virgins, with some level of education, good family background, etc.) who are considered to be more ‘valuable’, ‘morally upright’ and ‘marriageable’. When this competition is coupled with the yoke of *otongo-keny* on young men, the formerly abducted girls are left with limited ways of securing a solid marriage. While a ‘true’ Acholi girl has an option of resisting a man until he officially marries her, or has a pool of young men to select from, child mothers do not have that preference. For them, the aim of getting married is to gain stability and survival, with a further objective of achieving a sense of identity and belonging as a ‘married’ woman and mother. Being married for them is more about gaining social security than simply fulfilling cultural demands and having status. Particularly for former girl abductees, starting and maintaining a marriage is one way of redeeming their stigmatised identity. It is not clear whether, after moving in with a man, the woman may push her partner to pay the bride price. However, this is also unlikely. As will be discussed later in this chapter, formerly abducted girls find themselves in marriages where they are unable to negotiate their demands with their partners. They are also aware that if a man feels persuaded and pressured into paying bride price, he is likely to leave, replace her with another woman or get her a co-wife. With this fear and vulnerability, the women simply remain in loose marriages.

7.4.4 *Could Informal Marriages be good for Child Mothers?*

Although it is a concern in the community that young people are increasingly engaging in loose marriages, some young women find the idea of first living with a man before the bride price is decided and paid acceptable. One of them had this to say:

Today's marriage if you compare it with that of the past, there is a difference. Today's marriage is good because, your husband brings you to stay at *their home* for at least a year or more. During this time, you get to know each other very well; if he is bad, you will get to know and decide not to marry him. But when he marries you [paying bride price] when the marriage fails, it affects you a lot...¹⁰⁴

As the quotation exemplifies, a woman can live with a man for a year or longer in a loose marriage-like arrangement until they both are comfortable with each other and then decide to formalise their relationship. In such a case, there is less emphasis on ordinary courtship, since living with the man will determine if he is a potential marriage partner or not. In theory, this looks like a win-win situation where a woman has some bargaining power in terms of leaving the man if he does not respect and support her, or in cases of violence. However, in practice, as discussed later in this chapter, deserting such a marriage is still a complicated process and experience for women. In reality, informal marriage arrangements give men more bargaining power because they can easily walk out of the marriage, leaving the women to start all over again, with more children to take care of and the stigma of not sustaining a marriage.

Although accepting contemporary cohabitation and elopement, women lose their cultural values about life and marriage (Whyte *et al.*, 2013:10). Since they are unable to secure fixed customary marriages, they continue to engage in such unaccepted loose marriage-like situations. This is not because informal marriages are better for them; rather, with their limited life choices and circumstances, they are forced to go against their cultural values so as to engage in the marriage institution.

¹⁰⁴Respondent, FGD 03, Young women, Lokung

7.5 Marriage Patterns and Realities of Former Girl Abductees

Findings show that time in abduction does not have an effect on women's desire to get married when they exit armed groups. Because they may want to return to what they perceive as the stability of the pre-war arrangements' (Meintjes *et al.*, 2001:6), they endeavour to realise their marriage dreams. Of the participants, 54% described themselves as married women', 37% separated', 7% single mothers' and 2% as widows'. The length of marriages ranged from 1 to 31 years, averaging 5.6 years, including those who had separated from their partners at the time of our interviews. The majority (73.68%) had been married for a period ranging from 1–5 years.

Considering that length of reintegration ranged from 6 months to 12 years, averaging 6.5 years, and most of them (74%) had reintegrated for a period ranging from 6–10 years, the findings suggest that, after exiting the LRA, many of them stayed unmarried for some time (about 3–4 years). This delay could be attributed to the high levels of stigma, fear, self-esteem issues and/or need to get reacquainted with normal' life back home. The data does not support the argument that those who returned with children got married right away so as to find a means to provide for their children. The children were now the responsibility of the mothers' families (maternal grandparents) as the women tried to sort out their lives (see also Carlson & Mazurana, 2008:29).

In African post-conflict situations, marriage is seen as a viable option to achieve a successful social reintegration. Being married provides honour and stability (see Coulter, 2009:219). Although many participants did not think of getting married when they first returned home, they felt marriage was the only way to re-gain their identity, social security and self-esteem. Even if they got married at different stages of their reintegration, their decisions and motivation to get their own homes' were similar. They saw marriage as providing them with an opportunity to re-establish themselves in their community and boost their self-esteem.

As with their other life events, the marriage narratives tell of different experiences for former girl abductees, with many describing their marriages as good' or normal'—like for anyone else''. Husbands treat them well, including being supportive and non-violent. This also means the individual husband not referring to the abduction experience during arguments, and respecting and defending her before the in-laws. A good marriage for a former girl abductee occurs when she lives in harmony with her in-laws, neighbours and other community members: ...when there are ceremonies in the community for example funerals or any other activity, Joyce [former

abductee] is very active and mixes freely with people. She is not like other former girl abductees who have weird behaviour...’—a participant in a family discussion describing her daughter-in-law.¹⁰⁵ Living ‘in harmony’ with people in the immediate setting and behaving as the society expects or demands shows that a former girl abductee has successfully *reinserted* into the community (see also Gulu Support the Children Organization, 2010:14). According to the Acholi culture, a good person knows his or her duties, understands and follows the Acholi morality and sociality (see Apoko, 1967: 49; Oloya 2010). From the community perspective, ability to participate in neighbourhood events, live peacefully, associate respectfully with in-laws and other people, and sustain a marriage determines whether a former girl abductee is making progress with her reintegration or not. Living otherwise (in isolation or withdrawn from other people) is interpreted as having unusual or anti-social behaviour and failed social reintegration.

From the individual marriage narratives, it is clear that getting into and sustaining a marriage comes with a sense of pride, belonging, success and acceptance for former girl abductees. This, however, varies according to the nature of the marriage. The fixed, customarily married and cohabiting women draw more respect from their families and communities and have rights to family/clan resources, unlike the eloping women (Chapter Eight). If we are to compare the informal marriages, cohabiting is a safer marriage option for former girl abductees, because even if the husbands have not completed paying bride price, the reality that they are claiming full rights over their ‘wife’/partner and children provides women with some stability and social security. However, whether the individual husband is willing or able to eventually complete bride price and formalise the union creates tensions, uncertainties and instabilities among the cohabiting women. One participant expressed it this way:

...for a man to stay well with his wife and be sure that she loves him, he should fully marry her [completing payment of bride wealth] because if he does not, he will never see her true colours and complete love. This is because she will stay with the man while unsure about the marriage, and not knowing whether she will live at that man’s home forever or not.¹⁰⁶

We have already seen that a woman is married into her husband’s *kaka* (clan/patrilineage) and, before bride price is completed, she is considered an ‘outsider’ by her in-laws, thus her loyalty to the husband and marriage can easily change (see Girling, 1960:72). Until the bride price is

¹⁰⁵Mother in-law, FGD02, 10/10/2012.

¹⁰⁶Respondent, FGD02, Young Women, Kitgum town.

cleared, even if she gives birth, she is still seen as a newly married woman who, according to Allen (1994:131), may be dangerous: *she may be a sorcerer/poisoner. She may be unpredictable, her loyalties are unclear, she is a threat to her husband's sisters living at home and to other wives and their children*. Until bride price is completed, the *woman's loyalties will remain uncertain and have difficulties in establishing herself as an unthreatening insider in her new social context*' (Finnstrom, 2008:192). Therefore, even if the former girl soldiers can be in *good*' cohabitation marriages, as long as their bride price is not fully paid, they are still considered *outsiders* in *their own homes*'. Equally, their husbands are also not fully respected by girls' parents and brothers. In relation to marriage as a determinant of successful reintegration, as with their peers in elopements, women in cohabitation unions have also not obtained a formal position in their new societal context as a married woman and mother. Until their bride price is fully paid, their position in their marital families and communities remains unsecured and uncertain (see also Finnstrom, 2008:193).

7.5.1 Major Obstacles to having a home

Stigmatisation

Although factors like poverty, womanising husbands, pressure over bride price, and domestic violence, among others, hinder marriage attempts among young women in general, for the former girl soldiers, stigmatisation stands out as the single most influential reason for their marriage failures (see also Bailey, 2009:32). As already discussed, their stigma stems from their military background. Due to this background (stigma), families/clans encourage their sons to go for girls with no abduction past (see also Bailey, 2009). Like the case of Helen whom we met earlier on (Table 6.1), many women in this study repeatedly expressed frustration with the treatment they receive from their in-laws: *my sisters-in-law say I was in the bush and that their brother is not fit to be with someone like me, and that he should leave me and bring somebody else... Being stigmatised in my marriage makes life really hard. It is so painful.*¹⁰⁷ Many men who go ahead and marry former abductees are ridiculed into abandoning them, and those who stick by their women are often told never to boast of having a wife because they are harbouring a *rebel*' with a *bush/military mentality*' who might turn on them anytime (see also Justice & Reconciliation Project, 2006).

¹⁰⁷Interview CM10, Aminda.

This view of girl abductees originates from the fact that Acholi is a patriarchal society where violent behaviour is still attached to males. Women are accepted as nurturers and any experience of aggression is unnatural, bush-like, uncomfortable and unacceptable. If a *‘bush mentality’* (dangerous, unintelligent, offensive, intolerant, terrible and uncivilised mindset or behaviour) is coupled with their *‘feared’* military experience, they are seen as coming from a very *‘poor background’*, unwomanly and therefore heavily resented.

With their military background, they are assumed to be unable to submit to their husbands as is culturally expected of all wives. The community members, especially older women, who participated in this study argued that, when it comes to marriage and general relationships, former girl abductees, have attitudes contrary to those of other *‘normal’* (never-abducted) young women. Two of them had this to say:

...in Acholi culture, a wife has to follow the husband’s orders but not these people [former girl abductees]. They bring in their *bush mentality* which their husbands, with no abduction experiences cannot understand. The women want to be controlling and the husbands cannot take that pressure...leading to problems in their marriages...¹⁰⁸

...these women do not listen to advice. If you try to be harsh when talking to them, they become angry saying you want to control them. They become so rude and hard to live with.¹⁰⁹

These claims and reasoning are common in African post-conflict situations. As already highlighted in Chapter Three, while soldiering in captivity, girls learned how to survive, and they, particularly those who stayed with the fighting forces for a long time, deviated seriously from the norm, become quarrelsome or use offensive language, among others (see also McKay, 2005:25; McKay & Mazurana, 2004:37). Back in the communities, they are found or assumed to have behavioural problems and are accused of behaving contrary to their non-abducted peers. The society expects them to re-adopt the cultural status of a submissive woman/wife where they are not to question the man’s (or any person’s) authority (see also McKay & Mazurana, 2004:17). However, for some of them, being in the military environment for a long time left them with a changed way of thinking and responding to social issues. Although they are aware they have to be submissive, this remains difficult to achieve: *‘the abduction has greatly impacted my attitude. I have become a woman who does not allow a man or anyone to control me. I hate it when*

¹⁰⁸Participant, FGD02 Kitgum town centre, 16/11/2012.

¹⁰⁹Participant, FGD02.

someone tries to force me to do something I do not want. This is bad because according to Acholi culture, a woman should have a submissive nature.¹¹⁰ Others are judged for how they behave and respond to other people: ‘people say I talk and I am rude. For example my mother in-law says I don’t talk but command. That everything I say, I say it in a commanding tone. She also says when I want something done; I want it done so quickly. But if I am told to do something, I don’t listen...She also says that, I like staring people straight in the eye when they are talking to me...these are the reasons she gives for not liking me’.¹¹¹ When confronted with severe stigmatisation and other challenges, others respond with extreme violence. In a family discussion, one participant described how one of her two formerly abducted daughters had shocked her husband and in-laws and as a result was forced to return to her parents’ home:

...their [girl abductees] marriages are failing because people still call them rebels and at times they cannot take these insults. For example, Filder has left her marital home because somebody provoked and called her a rebel. Filder picked a razor blade and began cutting that person’s body. When the person started running and screaming, Filder picked a hoe and began chasing the person. We [Filder’s family] were immediately called there [marital home] and she was handed to us. That is why she is home now.¹¹²

Although they survived by being aggressive and violent, such reactions often interfere with their life back home (McKay & Mazurana, 2004:37), hindering their reintegration. Antisocial behaviour and violation of gender norms affect their ability to readjust to the expectations of the community. The time spent away from ‘normal’ society is not only a determinant of the participants’ behaviour and attitude towards marriage and other relationships, but also has had a long-lasting impact on their life in general. Many returned home with a different view of life that is contrary to an ordinary young woman: rougher, more assertive/aggressive, tougher, more individualistic, and with a higher sense of independence. This is apparent in those in towns, who are expressive, with a high sense of self-esteem. However, this achievement leaves them in a complicated and vulnerable position with no—or limited—ways of channelling this positive experience so that it does not come across as a ‘bush mentality’ or ‘unwomanly’.

In other countries, such as Sierra Leone, former girl soldiers were encouraged by some reintegration agencies to marry their former commanders and captors (see Coulter, 2009:219),

¹¹⁰Interview, CM01, Amida Sub county, 8/10/2012.

¹¹¹ Interview, CM 31

¹¹²Participant in FMD 01, Amida.

but this move was not seen as appropriate in Uganda. Reception centres instead advised girls otherwise: have nothing to do with that bush husband, many were told. Even the child mothers were dissuaded from tracing the paternal roots for their children:

...I did not attempt to do anything like that [finding the child's father and paternal relatives] because we were advised from World Vision that there was no need doing that since we suffered in the bush carrying and delivering them. They [children] are our consolations and blessings that God has given us and that we should even never let the relatives of their fathers know. Even about the mere fact that we were related to them and had come back home...¹¹³

They were instead encouraged to find new partners and forget their past. But because of stigma, among other problems, the new marriages with never-abducted men have also not been successful for many of them (see also Justice & Reconciliation Project, 2006).

Some of the participants were adamant that the community is responsible for their marriage woes where their never-abducted men are pressurised into mistreating or abandoning them. Although this community driven stigmatisation affects the way the men relate with the women, limiting the stigma problem to community members is not a sufficient reason to explain their marriage struggles. In an attempt to explain why marriages with non-abducted men rarely result in sustainable unions, the Justice & Reconciliation Project (2006) notes that this is because spouses who had never experienced abduction or life in the "bush" are unable to empathize or relate with those who did.⁶ The current findings support this argument. Instead of empathizing with their situation, their partners actually take advantage of the women's background and vulnerability:

Since we [abductees] came back home, men are just fooling around with and using us. They pick you knowing about your abduction experience and go on to say they will stay with you but then later, they start calling you a rebel. For instance, when I returned home, a man asked to marry me. I even had a child with him but he shortly abandoned me and this has increased my problems because I have more children to support...¹¹⁴

My bush experience has affected my social life. Had it not been my abduction past, I am sure I would be in my home [married]. I would be settled with a man in a family. But this does not happen because when I get married; people are always stigmatizing me. That man [former husband] was beating me a lot and calling me a rebel, which is why I left him. The fact that I am a former abductee makes life difficult for me.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Interview, CM57, Gulu, February 2013.

¹¹⁴ Interview, CM30, Amiya Anyima, 10/11/2012.

¹¹⁵ Interview, CM18

Anyone would expect a man who opposes and ignores the ill-feelings of their own families towards marrying a formerly abducted girl to sympathise with the women's situation and stigma. However, in most cases, the partners are part of the problem or are the source of it: *...because of the stigmatisation I go through in this community, my life has not been good since I came back home. My husband who could help to eradicate the stigmatisation is also a party to it. This makes me very unhappy...*¹¹⁶

Apart from separation (discussed further below), secrecy is another strategy to deal with stigmatisation in marriage. Among the seven women in the sample that had relocated from their villages to towns and purposely kept their captivity experience a secret, two of them had never revealed their past to their husbands. One of them (aged 36) had been married for two years but left her partner because of his womanising behaviour: *...people here in my marital home, there is no one who knows that I have been in the bush. I live a responsible life style just like everyone with no bush experience.*¹¹⁷ Although secrecy helps the participants protect themselves from stigmatisation, it remains limited to the few who are able to relocate to completely new environments.

Domestic Violence

The possibility of young men in Acholi being fewer than marriageable young women exacerbates the former abductees' marriage problems. Most relationships men create with former girl soldiers and other child mothers are not serious and do not end in a respected customary marriage. But because the young women are desperate to *...have a home*, they end up moving in with some of these men. When the union fails to work out, the men abandon them, leaving the women in a more socially and economically complex position and situation.

However, some men do stay with the women, but exercise their power by bestowing less respect, being violent and viewing the women as *...mentally unstable* and/or *...stupid*. Apart from stigmatisation, another problem facing formerly abducted girls in their marriages is domestic violence. While this study discusses domestic violence from the perspective of formerly abducted girls, it points to problems of abuse of young women in the wider Acholi community (see Annan & Brier, 2009; Okello&Hovil, 2007). Beyond Acholi, evidence shows that domestic

¹¹⁶ Interview CM25, Amiya Anyima, 07/11/2012.

¹¹⁷ Interview CM15, Amiya Anyima, 06/11/2012.

violence is prevalent in many parts of Uganda, with more than two thirds of women who ever married having experienced some kind of gender based violence (physical, sexual and emotional) in the recent past. The problem is worse for women in rural than in urban areas (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2006, cited in Uganda Women's Network, 2012:3). Beyond Uganda, it has been identified that domestic violence is the most prevalent yet relatively hidden and ignored form of violence against women and girls (World Health Organization, 1996). Intimate partner violence (IPV) is the most common form of domestic violence against the participants: *the range of sexually, psychologically and physically coercive acts used against adult and adolescent women by current or former male intimate partners* (World Health Organization, 1997). IPV is a prevalent problem in the Ugandan marriage context (see Demographic and Health Survey, 2006; Koenig *et al.*, 2003; Karamagi *et al.*, 2006; Zablotska *et al.*, 2007; Annan *et al.*, 2008).

Most of the participants repeatedly experience verbal abuse (threats, shouting or yelling) from their husbands. Among these, some experience physical threats or violence including pushing, slapping or holding them down: *my husband is very quarrelsome. He beats me. He verbally abuses me that I am from the bush, stupid and not mentally sound. That if I hadn't been abducted, I would have gone to school and may be would be a sensible woman...*¹¹⁸The men usually violate them when they are under the influence of alcohol or if there is a disagreement in the family (see also Annan *et al.*, 2008). Alcohol consumption before sex or at any other time not only emotionally distresses women, it is majorly responsible for the domestic violence in their marital homes. Studies have shown that the male partners' characters are predictors of their violent behaviour towards their spouses (Vlahov *et al.*, 1998) and have found a strong connection between consumption of alcohol or drugs and violent behaviour (see van der Straten *et al.*, 1998; Watts, 1998; Rao, 1997; Weinsheimer *et al.*, 2005; Karamagi *et al.*, 2006).

In Acholi (and indeed other Ugandan ethnic groups), there is a belief that a woman should be punished (by beating) if she does not pay heed to her husband or father or brother(s)-in-law (see Uganda Women's Network, 2012:3; Speizer, 2010; Uganda Demographic and Health Survey 2000-2001, 2006:411). Considering that in Acholi, customary law seems to overrule civil law, the women have to find ways to live with it. Among the participants, unlike those in towns,

¹¹⁸ Interview, CM11 Aminda, 15/10/2012.

women in remote villages seemed to endure the violence. Town participants were more likely to condemn and walk away from violent marriages (see also Rani *et al.*, n.d.). Their remote village counterparts were left trapped in their marriages because, as complete dependants of men, they hoped to gain material and social security, access to resources like land, and to search for fulfilment of their needs. As a consequence, engaging in marriage is for them more of a need than a desire. It is not their choice to endure the stigmatisation and domestic violence, but with no other alternative, they decide to stay in the marriages.

While the impacts of physical abuse may be more visible than stigmatisation, psychological scarring, shouting, humiliation and constant threats of violence and injury are more subtle and dangerous forms of violence directed at this category of women in their marriages. Marital homes are often equated with or expected to be a sanctuary, a place where women seek love, safety and protection. However, for many of the participants, their marital homes (and biological families) are places that expose them to danger and breed severe forms of violence towards them: *elements of their [formerly abducted girls'] new relationships [mirror] that of their forced marriages* during abduction, such as the physical violence and inability to leave or escape these relationships (Annan & Brier, 2010). Violence against them has become a cycle of abuse that has manifested itself in many forms throughout their lives (life in captivity and back home). Domestic violence leaves them in a situation where they are often made to feel helpless and psychologically destabilized.

8.5.2 Separation as the only Response to Stigmatisation and Domestic Violence

However important marriage is to the young women, they still resist the stigmatisation, violence and other problems they encounter. They do this by making selfless choices like deserting the unions. Particularly, of the women who were eloping, 37 per cent had deserted their marriage and one of them had separated from her second partner. The separated women either end up living with their parent(s) or renting in trading centres and town slums, while taking care of their children and other dependants (see also Baines & Gauvin, 2014:290). Of the 54 per cent that were *having a home* (married), 7 per cent (n=4) were attempting marriage for the second time since they exited the LRA. Although some of the participants were still living with their partners, plans of abandoning *their homes* were revealed during the interviews. They were frustrated and had lost hope in their men and marriage: *it [marriage] is not really good because he abuses and*

insults me saying I am insane given that I came back from the bush. He also likes fighting and beating me a lot... Life is very hard for me here and I plan to leave'.¹¹⁹ Leaving the marriage often happens after a considerable period of time, but in other cases it occurred in less than a year:

When I returned home, my parents had died and I struggled with life. I met a man and we started an informal marriage which lasted less than a year. I left him because I could not stand what people there [marital home] were saying about me and my children. I left that home and started renting here in town and taking care of my children. Since 2009 to date, I am still not married.¹²⁰

Even though the findings reveal high marriage separation rates among former girl abductees, this should be set in the wider post-conflict Acholi situation, and not only associated with an abduction past. When former girl soldiers' problematic marriages are compared to other young women within the Acholi society, the study concludes that this turbulence in the marriage institution is a legacy of a long war (see also Isis-WICCE, 2001:45). In an attempt to explain the high levels of marriage' separation among former girl abductees and other young women (who mainly end up in loose marriage-like circumstances), the participants reported that, when they encounter problems in their homes', they find abandoning them for newer unions or single parenthood living as the only solution. With no marriage counselling or any other related support, for many of these women, separation is inevitable.

Finnistroom (2008:193) notes that a formal marriage with bride wealth may assist in neutralizing such threatening potentials [cen] of former rebel women', but with the bride price fully paid, a woman's opportunities to abandon a sour marriage are limited. Here, the woman is often advised by her family to endure and maintain her marriage even if she is not happy. Because returning home means the parents or brothers will be subjected to bride price refunding, the woman is persuaded to stay in the marriage: if you cannot bear the marriage challenges after giving birth and decide to separate with the man, you are again insulted for failing to sustain your marriage regardless of your pleas. Instead of returning the money they [father and/or brothers] could have received from their in-laws for you to be peaceful...¹²¹ Bride price keeping women

¹¹⁹Interview CM07 Amida, 11/10/2012.

¹²⁰ Interview CM 35.

¹²¹Respondent FGD03 Young Women, Lokung.

in violent marriages has been widely discussed (see Baryomunsi, 2004; Macdonald-Levy & MacMillan, 2005; Hague *et al.*, 2011; Horne, *et al.*, 2013). According to the terms agreed upon when the bride price is paid, there is a possibility of refund, particularly in the event of marriage break-up. Under the customary marriage law, if a woman can prove her dissatisfaction with her husband or marriage in general, she can be allowed to separate from the husband. The other condition is that her new husband pays the bride price that was paid to her family by the former husband. This shows how complicated it can be for a young woman to desert a fixed or cohabitation marriage. She either relies on her supportive family to refund the bride price or must find another man to service that debt—meaning leaving one marriage for another. Considering that most of these women are financially dependent on their husbands, lack any power to make demands upon the men, their families cannot (or are unwilling to) repay the bride price, and they cannot get a new husband able and willing to repay their debt; the women remain stuck in the bad marriages. These are the women that are most at risk of being subjected to further abuse and exploitation in their marriages.

Nonetheless, the difficulty of deserting a fixed or cohabitation marriage should not suggest that returning home when an *elopement* marriage fails is any easier. The fact that the woman has never taken the man to her family so that bride price is agreed upon and paid leaves her in a dilemma when the union fails:

Staying with a man without sending something [bride price] back home, you feel ashamed because in the past, if you are formally married in a family and maybe you separate from your husband, you easily go back home [parental]. In this case, if your bride price was transferred to marry your brother's wife, you will go and stay at your brother's house. But if you are not married [eloping], you will fear to go back home when the union fails because you will be thinking, If I separate with this man, where will I go and stay? Whose house will I enter to live in?¹²²

For some women, it is not bride price or the absence of it that hinders their mobility in this institution, but the burden of extra children. Even if the marriage/union is not working out as hoped, women are more concerned and worried about what will become of their children. Their children become the reason they endure bad marriages: if it was not because of my children I would have left him, but I already have three children with him and I cannot leave them or go

¹²²Respondent, FGD02 Young Women, Kitgum town.

away with them...¹²³ With no economic independence, women have no power to take care of their children and themselves. The option of leaving the union and returning to their parental family with one or more children is also not an easy choice to make.

Another category of the participants were stuck in these hopeless marriages because they simply did not have anyone or any family to escape to. These were total orphans with no alternative but to endure the bad marriage. For example, 20 year old Josephine had been eloping for two years and had one child at the time of study. She desperately wanted to leave her marriage but because she has nowhere or anyone to turn to, she was forced to go on with the marriage: I am just staying here because there is nowhere else I can go. Only if there was somewhere I could go, I would not continue living like this, with people who despise me.¹²⁴ These women are trapped in bad marriages because they have no one to turn to or simply because they cannot afford to live alone or move back in with parents where they will still be stigmatised and ridiculed for not getting their own home.

7.6 Marriage Remains a Significant Element of Long-Term Reintegration

Regardless of the problems girl abductees encounter in their attempts to get married, this is an aspect of life they cannot afford to completely walk away from. To the formerly abducted girls, marriage is life. Fear of being viewed as nothing, a *malaya* (prostitute) and/or *Gekere* (second hand or second class women) causes them to stay in bad marriages or re-enter new ones. Abandoning a marriage means the cycle starts all over again for an individual woman—waiting and searching for another man to honour and give her a home. This testing process may take a long time: ...I angrily left my home and came back to my mother's home. I have been here now for three years... I have failed to get my home because people say that, if a man marries someone who has been in the bush, she might kill him one time” and this is why I am still living at *our home* [parental].¹²⁵ At the time of interviews, many of the participants that had abandoned their marriages had been searching for new husbands for a while (about 2–4 years).

This continuous searching and longing for marriage is understandable. Considering that the participants' demographic data shows an average age of 26 years, many former abductees are

¹²³ Interview, CM25.

¹²⁴ Interview CM20, Amiya Anyima, 08/11/ 2012.

¹²⁵ Interview CM44, Lokung, 13/12/ 2012.

still young, with many chances of reattempting to have a home‘. In addition, being unmarried beyond the age of 25 may prompt people to start perceiving them as abnormal‘, cursed or carrying *cen* and in need of cultural healing. Until they get potential‘ men to give them homes‘, they have to withstand stigmatisation for having abandoned their marriage and returned to their mothers‘ homes‘. They receive and are accorded very little respect because their marriage failure is simply concluded to be their total fault. They are viewed as undisciplined, irresponsible and unmarriageable: we are constantly insulted in the community. They call us *gekere*. We are not free; the community members insult us. Since we are not married, the community sees us as total failures‘.¹²⁶

Because marriage is a cultural shared norm that they are expected to fulfil and failure at it promotes social isolation and stigma, it is no surprise that at the time of interviews, some of the participants had been married once or twice before they were even 25 years old. Although aware of the dangers that come with changing men, when they are stranded, unable to keep up with the social pressure and stigmatisation, they opt to go back and forth in these irregular marriages: the man will come to you and convince you that, with me, you will not have the same problem like the one you had in your previous marriage‘ and with the poverty you are facing, you decide to go for another marriage.¹²⁷

The relationship between an individual child mother and her parents impacts the former’s decisions when she returns home after a marriage has failed. Inability to draw sympathy and support from their own families pushes them to desperate measures like going back to their same bad marriage:

The problem is with our parents. For us who have delivered at an early age and come back home because the man is terrible, the parents talk to us in a bad way. This unpleasant treatment will annoy you all the time and when your former husband asks you to go back; you find you do not have any better alternative but to go back.¹²⁸

All these factors drive them to either keep with their violent and stigmatising husbands or enter another marriage and, if unlucky, the haste lands them in another bad union. The cycle starts all over again. Changing men does not provide any relief from their challenges but instead doubles

¹²⁶ Participant FGD01, Kitgum, 18/10/2012.

¹²⁷ Respondent FGD02, Young Women, Kitgum, 20/10/2012.

¹²⁸ Participant FGD01.

their magnitudes, for example producing a number of children with different men. This also increases their vulnerability, risk and exposure to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. But, for them as individuals, considering the cultural importance of marriage, however frustrating and challenging they find these unions to be, with their social and economic standing, they cannot afford to give up on finding a stable ‘_home’. With no other means to survive, cope with stigmatisation, and regain their deserved positions as Acholis, the fight to secure a good marriage continues for this category of young women.

7.7 Concluding Remarks

Chapter Six discussed stigma promotion and how it hinders reintegration. The present chapter has extended this discussion by analysing participant marriage experiences and realities. Among other factors, stigmatisation, violence and patriarchal tendencies are the main challenges to their marriage attempts. However, because being married is central to social identity and status and the women depend on marriage for socio-economic survival, many stick in ‘_bad’ marriages or, alternatively, abandon them and attempt to remarry. In addition to stigmatisation and marriage problems, another reintegration challenge participants share is their lack of assets and capabilities to generate sufficient income. Findings suggest strongly that ability to earn an income positively impacts socio-economic reintegration and well-being of such vulnerable women. However, although many try to make their life situations bearable by engaging in one or more livelihood options, they still cannot sustain themselves and have to rely on other people to help them to meet their production and consumption needs.

CHAPTER EIGHT

REINTEGRATION AND LIVELIHOODS

This chapter which discusses economic reintegration is loosely based on the sustainable livelihoods framework (see Carney, 1998; Scoones, 1998). Livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including information, cultural knowledge, social networks and legal rights) as well as tools, land and other physical resources and activities required for a means of living (see Chambers & Conway, 1992). Basically, livelihood is the command an individual has over an income and/or bundles of resources that can be used or exchanged to satisfy his or her needs. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base (ibid).

Livelihood is another great reintegration priority and challenge for former child soldiers. Save for the Survey of War Affected Youth (SWAY) by Annan *et al.* (2006, 2008), research exploring the impact of life in captivity on livelihoods following reinsertion into the communities is still scant. With livelihood strategies undergoing a significant change in Acholi, this chapter analyses their long term effect(s) on the formerly abducted girls. The findings support the hypothesis that war and life in captivity reduce child abductees' human capital in form of education and health. Back in the communities, this deficit affects their livelihood options and subsequent economic reintegration. Although most northern Ugandan youth face an acute economic dilemma (see Annan *et al.*, 2008; International Alert, 2013), it is more challenging for formerly abducted young adults. With their economic reintegration characterised by extreme scarcity and deprivation, they are doing worse than their never-abducted peers (Annan *et al.*, 2008:13; see also Verhey, 2002; Boothby, 2006; Françoise & Specht, 2003).

8.1 Abduction and Lost Education Opportunity

The prolonged conflict affected education provision in most areas of northern Uganda (see Bird *et al.*, 2011; HRW, March & July 2003). Many adolescents (abducted or not) missed out on education and skill training (Women's Commission, 2001), leading to prevalent youth illiteracy and unemployment today (see International Alert, 2013; Annan, *et al.*, 2011:13). Loss of education and the resultant literacy gap is worse for women than males (see Annan *et al.*,

2008:18). For the participants, one of the most devastating outcomes of their recruitment appears to be the years of education and economic opportunity lost. The majority (75%) were attending primary school (grades 1–4) at the time of their abduction, cutting short their chance of attaining an education or skill training. As demonstrated in Figure 8.1, due to various problems and circumstances, many did not rejoin school when they returned home.

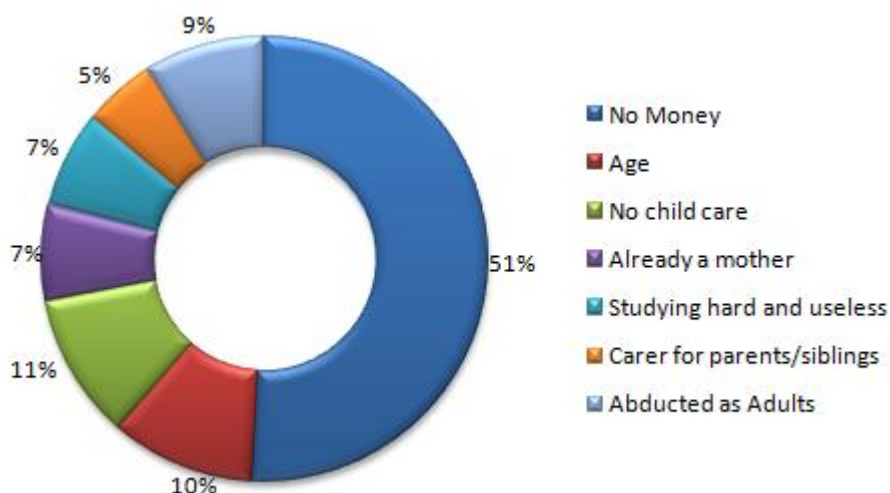


Fig8.1: Reasons for not going back to/continuing with school upon return

Interviews show that the level of education at time of recruitment, length of abduction, age at return and motherhood determine if a former female abductee can go back to mainstream education or join vocational studies (see also Annan *et al.*, 2008:23).

Among the participants who were attending school at the time of abduction or were yet to enrol, only 12 per cent (N=7) went back to school when they returned from captivity. These all had had at least four years of education prior to their abduction. This suggests that young returnees with a considerable level of education are more likely to rejoin mainstream education if supported. Participants who had at least four years of education felt they could fit into school when they first returned, unlike those who had to start from lower primary classes. Young women gave varying reasons why they dropped out of school (those who had rejoined) or did not bother going back at all. Although the majority blamed lack of money to support their education, many saw themselves as too old (mainly as a result of motherhood) or were unwilling to go back to primary school and sought to join vocational training programmes:

I did not go back to school when I returned home because my period for studying had already passed and it was not possible to start primary one. But I went for a tailoring course.¹²⁹

Going back to school, as an adult is very difficult because I returned home when I had already delivered three children. To add on that, if I decided to go back to school, I would be starting from primary one. Imagine that. It would be possible and appropriate if I had at least stopped around primary four when I was abducted.¹³⁰

Motherhood is a big determinant for female child abductees to either pursue education or not (see McKay & Mazurana, 2004; HRW, March & July 2003; Mazurana & Carlson, 2004). Exiting armed groups, child mothers are mostly unable, disallowed, or unwilling to attend school. In fact, the seven participants who went back to school had not returned with children and were in captivity for less than four years. Compared to their never abducted peers in northern Uganda, formerly abducted child mothers have attained significantly less schooling (roughly 1.3 fewer grades) and are considerably more likely to be illiterate (Annan *et al.*, 2008:23). Exiting armed groups with children, child mothers see themselves as adults by virtue of having given birth. They view caring for their children as their main responsibility and place high priority on the education of their children, even when most of them have no means to achieve that: I did not go back to school because I already had children. But then how could you go back and study when children are not in school? The only school related support I needed then and still need is for my children.¹³¹ Similarly, participants who were in captivity for a long time were in most cases also unable or unwilling to resume mainstream education due to emotional illnesses, shame and low self-esteem issues. They felt unable to concentrate on schoolwork: I have not been able to return back to school. I feel like I am not as bright as I was before abduction. I believe I died and later resurrected after I was battered in captivity. I also stayed long in the bush and wonder if my dull feelings are a result of the blackout I experienced¹³² (see also HRW, March & July 2003). Research shows that abduction length impacts on the education loss and illiteracy gap among female returnees (see Annan *et al.*, 2008:23).

¹²⁹Interview CM36.

¹³⁰Interview, CM22.

¹³¹Interview, CM58.

¹³²Interview, CM28.

8.2 Dependence on Peasant Farming

With little or no education, knowledge or skills to enable them to acquire employment or financial capital to start up a small business, many formerly abducted girls are among the poorest of the poor in Acholi. With no other livelihood alternative, they depend on peasant farming that they were born, socialised and apprenticed into. However, among other challenges, two factors hinder their full participation in this livelihood: land accessibility and poor health.

8.2.1 Women's Limited Access and Ownership Rights of Land

Gender inequality in land accessibility and ownership across the developing world has been widely documented (for example, see Deere & Doss, 2008; Deere *et al.*, 2009). Women's land accessibility and ownership in Uganda is consistently lower than that for men (see Associates for Development and Centre for Basic Research, 2006). The 1995 Constitution (Chapter IV, Article 33, pp.20–58) promotes protection from deprivation of property for both women and men. The 1998 Land Act (Chapter 227, section 27) also solidifies this policy and supports women's access to and use of land. However, limited access to and ownership of land (and other resources) remains a huge hindrance to women's economic development (see Uganda Bureau of Standards, 2011). The presence or absence of land depends on cultural practices, gender and financial status. The land system practised, traditional norms and low economic status limit Acholi (and other Ugandan) women from inheriting; accessing and owning land (see Doss *et al.*, 2012).

As discussed in Chapter Four, land in Acholi society is held under customary tenure. Although the Ugandan 1998 Land Act provides land rights for women, it also states that, under customary law, women do not own land—they can only fight to access it, but not own it. There are three ways they can do this: through marriage, parents and renting (or even buying). For extremely poor women like the participants, marriage and parents are the only means (68 per cent reported access to cultivation land through these two channels).

Accessing Land through Marriage

Marriage ensures that a woman can access her husband's land for food production even in the event of the husband's death (see Adoko & Levine, 2004). The widow can still access the husband's land only in trust for the male children; in principle, she is the custodian of the land until the children become adults and the land transfers to their control. This, however, works in favour of the legally married women. Those who end up in *informal* marriages like most of the

participants may have no right to even access land. At the death of the husband, his family may remove the land from the care of the mother and her children (Human Rights Focus, 2013). Although war, education, religion and modernity are slowly changing social life organisation, Acholi is still a patriarchal society. Women's rights—or lack thereof—to access land are not so much rooted in the legal system but in the gender relations that continue to prevail in this region (Adoko & Levine, 2005). While the Ugandan constitution recognises women as property owners, patriarchal and cultural practices are still marginalising females in these aspects. Governmental efforts to mainstream gender in policy and planning are making some progress but areas in which gender inequalities are still salient include gender disparities in education, access and control over productive resources, and gender based violence.

Accessing Land through Parents

As long as a woman is living with both parents in the same household, she is able to access the family land. This access is based on the relationship shared between the family and a young woman. For example, some of the maternal orphans in the sample were not able to access family land. In such cases, accessibility can only be granted based on sympathy for the woman emanating from other family/clan members. Those who feel she has access by virtue of being a child to a particular man or family/clan will in fact side with her in demanding access and utilisation of land. However, this is also not a straightforward process. At times, clan members side with the step-mother, or they frustrate this means of access. For instance, in the case of a failed marriage, when a paternal orphan returns to her father's ancestral land, she is likely to face a challenge in sharing land with clan brothers and their wives:

...when I came back from the bush, I found cases of land disputes rising. To make matters worse, they [family/clan members] look at us [abductees] as foreigners and they do not want us to even use the land for digging. My very own brothers and relatives are denying me land. Cases of land wrangle are a big issue in my family. When I want to grow food, I have to hire a garden from some other people...¹³³

Cases of orphans being marginalised by paternal relatives were common among the participants. This leaves such female returnees most vulnerable, with no one to stand up to such family and clan relatives.

¹³³Interview CM09.

Inability to access family land drives some of them to change men or remain in marriages where they are stigmatised and violated. Take the example of 20-year-old Josephine, whom we met in Chapter Seven. She attempted to abandon her *‘bad’* marriage and return to her (deceased) father’s land. She was, however, blocked by her clan relatives from cultivating it. Left with no choice, she returned to her marriage: *‘I cannot go back home, there is no land that I can cultivate there. I tried to go back home before and it was difficult and I had to return to my husband. If I go back again, my relatives will once again ask me what has chased me from my marriage, and why I am back to bother them’*.¹³⁴ This tossing about between marriage and family/clan members hinders reintegration and chances to concentrate on agriculture livelihood. Historically, such land disputes in Acholi were settled by clan elders but, recently, various actors (religious leaders, politicians, local government officials, etc.) are involved in settling disputes. However, for female returnees, the notion of attaining external assistance to access agricultural land is still an alien concept (see McKibben & Bean, n.d). Poorly informed of their options, they are left to choose between land that may offer them a livelihood strategy in *‘bad’* marriages or living a more economically challenging and stigmatising life as single parents.

Renting and Purchasing Land

With marriage and parents resulting in limitations on land accessibility for female returnees, some resort to purchasing or renting land in order to grow food. In recent years, because of increasing land disputes, the rate at which individuals are buying and owning land is rising. However, considering that female returnees are among the poorest in the region, purchasing land is simply unachievable for most of them. Only one participant (see case study 1, further below) had purchased a piece of land in her home district. Those who could not access land through marriage and parents were left with only one option, renting land to grow food. The practice of renting land as described in the 1998 Land Act is like *‘leasehold tenure’*, whereby one party grants to another the *‘right’* to exclusive possession of land for a specified period, usually, but not exclusively, in exchange for the payment of rent. In the case of Acholi, rents range between 5,000 and 50,000 Uganda Shilling (US\$3 to 24) per farming season. This depends on the size of the plot of land and its location (accessibility, fertility, safety). However, considering their low cash inflows (discussed later in this chapter), renting a relatively good piece of land may also be

¹³⁴Interview, CM20.

impossible for many young women. Others may rent only for a single season, and when the harvest is poor, they are unable to renew.

Children Born in Captivity and Access to Land

Women with children born in captivity (CBIC) face an even more complex land accessibility situation. Most of the children end up with their maternal grandparents/relatives, while others remain with their mothers, either in new relationships or as single parents. Unlike their mothers, their rights to access maternal grandparents' land are narrower. Since land accessibility is through inheritance (father to son), unless a CBIC switches lineage, from that of the mother to either that of the LRA father or step-father, they lack this right/claim. With their real fathers and paternal clans unknown, they remain at the mercy of their maternal relatives. One returnee's circumstances with her two CBIC (girl and boy) are informative:

I do not have any land to dig... Ever since I returned from the LRA, I have never gone back to my home [father's land] in the village. I hear about land wrangles there and this makes me worry about my child because without land, *he* will suffer. There is no man that will take care of my child, even if he loves me. I think about taking the child back to our home but since my father died when I was still young, I have no idea how his land was demarcated. This is making life hard for me.¹³⁵

This concern for land accessibility was a common theme across all the interviews with formerly abducted child mothers. But as the quotation above tells, the worry and need for accessing this natural resource varies according to the CBIC's gender. Although a mother may have two children (boy and girl), the land concern issue is greater for a male child. There is an assumption that, unlike the male CBIC, girls can always access land through their husbands when they get married. Therefore, there is greater need for male CBIC to access land so as to be able to raise a family. However, regardless of this difference, mothers generally worry about their children's education and future well-being. Mothers are aware that when CBIC become young adults, they will be in a more difficult land/home situation than they currently face, even those in the care of their maternal relatives:

My future plan is to have a place of my own, for my children to call home. Even if we are living at my aunt's home, in the future, as human beings, people will get tired of my children and would expect them to find their own places. I have to plan for them before

¹³⁵Interview, CM34.

they become adults by finding a piece of land, construct a house on it. For agricultural land, if I find a Good Samaritan to allow me rent their land, we can grow some food...¹³⁶

For this category of female returnees, their successful reintegration is beyond their acceptance in family and community, ‘good’ marriage or their access to land. It is about achieving a sustainable livelihood to ensure that their children have stability and are taken care of. When asked about their plans for the future, all mothers disclosed that their desire and priority is to ensure their children have access to education and land. The reality and worry about their children’s inability to access such basic needs as land and a stable home leaves their reintegration and integration of their children problematic and far from successful. Mothers appealed for the children to be supported so that they can study and find stable land and home. This will stop the children’s continuous stigmatisation, resentment and rejection:

Our [with siblings] ancestral land that our dead father left is there but our paternal uncle disturbs us. He does not want us to cultivate the land. Now days we are looking for land from other people. For my case, I am suffering more with these children I came back with from the bush. My relatives do not want them on their land. We [abductees] need help with land where we can raise these children from. They need a home and stability.¹³⁷

8.2.2 *‘If only I was normal’: Health Complications Impacting Peasant Farming*

Interviews show female fighters return from war with physical and health problems (see also Chrobok&Akutu, 2008; McKay &Mazurana, 2004:63–67). The participants reported physical and reproductive health problems resulting from rape and incidents of physical strain that occurred during captivity. They suffer from severe chest, back and abdominal pains, headache, stomach ulcers, bullet wounds and fragments, and general weaknesses (see also McKay &Mazurana, 2004:67). According to them, the root cause of their health complications is due to the heavy loads they carried, physical torture, starvation and bullet fragments that are still lodged in their bodies. Since they exited the LRA, many have not had proper diagnosis and treatment: ‘...I was shot in the chest below my breast and a bullet got lodged there and it is still there up to now. I feel severe pain every day. I was scanned twice at Lacor and St Joseph Hospital but they did not find anything. But recently when I did another scan, a bullet was seen lodged in the bone

¹³⁶Interview, CM34.

¹³⁷Interview, CM30.

and cannot be removed'.¹³⁸ Although such health complications are common, many other injured females and males in northern Uganda still urgently need appropriate medical attention (see Annan *et al.*, 2008; Isis-WICCE, 2006; Liebling-Kalifani & Baker, 2009; Liebling-Kalifani *et al.*, 2008), such problems remain particularly severe among returnees (see also Allen & Schomerus, 2006).

Apart from health complications being aggravated by domestic violence, leaving them physically weaker and psychologically tormented, changing gender roles are putting such women (with poor health conditions) in a more difficult position. Traditionally, as discussed in Chapter Four, households practise gendered division of labour: a man is expected to play a significant role in farming, including labour intensive tasks like field clearing, breaking the land, planting and harvesting. In addition to domestic tasks, a wife's roles have always been those of weeding, harvesting; transporting and preparation of food. However this is changing whereby women are faced with the challenge of doing more than supporting their households through productive work (weeding, food preparation and processing). Food production requires considerable effort from husband, wife and other household members, but providing for a family is today steadily curving towards women (see also Ahikire *et al.*, 2010).

Camp life in particular is felt to have severely affected the ability of a traditional male family head to provide for his family. It has become worse in the post conflict phase, where transference of many responsibilities from men to women has seemingly become entrenched. Women assuming productive roles is said to have been rare before people went to camps: those days before people came to camps, it was men who used to dig and women did the weeding. But nowadays, you find that it is women who take charge and dig and at the same time weed the garden while majority of men are just drunkards.¹³⁹ Even though men can be seen working in gardens (as individuals, in small groups or with the ox-plough), this happens less than before the war broke out. In addition to their usual heavy and time consuming reproductive roles, women are expected invest more energy and hours in their productive roles (agriculture and other subsidiary occupations) to ensure safety and survival for their families (see also Okello & Hovil, 2007).

¹³⁸Interview, CM40.

¹³⁹Participant, FGD03.

In their report on northern Uganda, Ahikire and others found that in most of the households studied, a pattern of comparative male absence and women's strong presence emerged in the data. Women were living as single mothers, aged and widowed. For those in marriages/relationships, spouses contributed little or nothing. The majority of men, if not physically or psychologically disabled, were reportedly sufficiently demoralised that they spent most of their time in alcohol consumption (Ahikire *et al.*, 2010:17). Possibly due to physical or psychological problems and unemployment, men (and some women) could be observed drinking as early as 10 am throughout the village trading centres, with young men frequenting drinking places and playing cards throughout most of their day. As single mothers, widows or those married to unmotivated men, women feel obliged to clear the land, break the ground and plant crops to keep their families fed:

I find that the capacity of a woman to dig is not the same as that of a man. But now because of the pressure to feed the family, you will have to break the ground yourself and grow food. If you do not, there is nothing you can do to take care of your children because your husband will not do it. Women are doing all these things on conditions and if it was not because of scarcity, women would not do these heavy works.¹⁴⁰

Going back to the formerly abducted girls, these are the contexts they find themselves in (as orphans, single mothers or with demoralised spouses). They are expected to function and support their family livelihoods like other young women but, because of their poorer health, many are unable to undertake the back-breaking agricultural work (see also Allen & Schomerus, 2006:25). This inability further creates anxiety and emotional distress among these women: ‘... due to abduction experience, my working capacity has reduced. The moment I work hard, I get severe chest pains and I will be down for about 2 to 3 days while I have garden work to be done in those 3 days, but I will be at home with pains, this annoys me.’¹⁴¹ With no money to hire people to open up a garden, plant, weed and harvest for them, they are left at the mercy of their husbands or family members who, at times, do not sympathise with their poor health. Phrases like ‘_he does not dig for me’ or ‘_he is not supportive with garden works’ were often used to express the women's frustration with their husbands.

A non-supportive husband in farming was another reason why some of the participants had abandoned or were thinking of abandoning their marriages. For example, at the age of 28, Stella

¹⁴⁰Participant, FGD04.

¹⁴¹Interview, CM54.

could not open a garden for herself due to her severe chest pains. Her pleas with her demoralised, unemployed, alcoholic and violent husband to do it for her had been futile. She was left to beg food from her ageing mother and neighbours or feed her children on wild greens and fruits, making her reintegration a desperate and a problematic process. Being married to such a husband comes with daily scorn from friends and family members but, because their own families are too poor to take care of the women and the children, they choose to stay with such a man. To save the situation, with their health complications, they have no choice but go out and find ways of feeding their families: "...at times, with my chest pains, I weed in people's gardens... if I do not do that kind of work, I will completely be unable to provide food for my children. Whenever the pain is too much, it becomes very hard for me to do even that soft farming..."¹⁴²

8.3 Supplementary Livelihood Strategies

The chapter has so far discussed how life in captivity leaves female returnees with reduced human resource, and many of them are incapable of fully engaging in subsistence agriculture. Such factors may explain the chronic scarcity of food and other basics that define their economic reintegration. However, like their non-abducted peers formerly abducted young women venture into other possible ways to earn money and support their families (see also Women's Commission, 2001, 2002; Save the Children, 2002). Although they still participate in peasant farming, many are increasingly supplementing this livelihood by engaging in informal economic activities like alcohol brewing, small trading/business and casual labour, among others. The range of these opportunities is much wider in towns than in remote villages, with village participants mainly exchanging their labour for money in agriculture-related activities.

Formerly abducted girls adopt economic patterns followed by most of the poorest youth in the region (see Annan *et al.*, 2008:11). They start by engaging in less profitable activities such as hawking natural items like firewood, wild fruits and vegetables, or doing manual work (agricultural or construction). When they have accumulated a little in savings, they upgrade to charcoal selling, brewing, agricultural reselling or petty business (a more profitable, stable and regular income activity). Getting to this level is regarded as a sign of arrival (a foot on the economic ladder), representing reward for hard work, shrewdness and ability to save money:

¹⁴²Interview, CM07.

I started by hawking firewood, bamboo stalks and greens. Then my cousin brother gave me some little start-up capital and I opened up a small charcoal business. When I saved some money, I was advised to start a small eating joint. So I shifted to this trading centre [former camp] and I opened up this small restaurant business. I am renting this place highly and not making much profit. Before people went back to their villages, I would get considerably good money but not any money. Now, I get about 20,000/= on a good day and around 10,000/= on a bad day. I am planning on abandoning this business and start up a shop at Gandyang side [Kitgum town].¹⁴³

However, with no financial capital to start or expand their basic business ventures, engaging in serious business is still unachievable for many of the formerly abducted girls who continue trading in natural resources and other back-breaking activities to earn a living.

8.3.1 Tailoring has had Little Impact on Livelihoods

Economic reintegration commonly involves vocational training, livelihood skills and catch-up education programmes to provide former child soldiers with livelihood options (Ozerdem, 2003). Returning to contexts of chronic poverty and limited employment opportunities, skills training opportunities have been assumed to positively impact economic reintegration (see Machel, 1996, 1996a, 2001; Annan *et al.*, 2006, 2008; Boothby *et al.*, 2006). A total of 44 per cent of the participants benefited from vocational skill training programmes as part of transitional support. Although skills received varied, the focus in this chapter is on tailoring because it was (and continues to be) commonly offered to female returnees and their non-abducted peers. However, despite the goodwill of NGOs and community based organisations, tailoring and other skills have not been beneficial in progressing the participants' economic reintegration (see also Annan *et al.*, 2008).

Upon completion of a tailoring course, some participants indeed relied on their tailoring skill to earn a living, working either as individuals or in groups. But, over time, tailoring has not been successful in securing an income and empowerment for many of them. Reasons ranging from no/broken sewing machines to little income from the activity were cited by women, leading them to cut short their participation in this activity. Prossy's story (Table 8.2)¹⁴⁴ is an illustration of

¹⁴³ Interview, CM15.

¹⁴⁴ Interview, CM 55, Gulu town, 5/2/2013,

how a hands-on skill like tailoring *can* provide a secure livelihood and contribute to long-term economic reintegration.

Table 8.2: Positive Impact of Tailoring on Reintegration – Prossy’s Story

Prossy, now 28 years old was abducted at the age of 10 in 1994. After 11 years with the LRA, first as a *ting-ting* and later as a corporal, commanding a unit of 11 soldiers, she escaped in 2005, pregnant with her first child. Along with her, she brought seven people of her unit. Like many of formerly abducted girls, she underwent a tailoring skill training course for 6 months. This was offered by KICWA. She did not get a sewing machine after the training and did not have money to hire one, either. Equipped with the skill, she struggled to find employment in Kitgum, but in vain. She later joined her young brother in Gulu, searching for opportunities and support for her and her son. In Gulu, she did odd jobs including being a domestic helper (maid) and hawking people’s items for a commission.

She later got a tailoring job at Living Hope centre. This is a Christian organisation (part of Watoto Church) that empowers vulnerable single mothers with a basic economic skill. Living Hope employs young women with a skill and experience and because of her tailoring training, Prossy obtained employment here in the tailoring department. She started by sewing clothes and making different kinds of dolls. She was paid according to the number of orders she completed in two weeks. Suppose she made 8 dolls in two weeks, she was paid 120,000 Uganda shilling (\$49). Therefore, the more dolls she produced, the more money she earned in that period. She did tailoring for two years and because of her outstanding performance and competence she was promoted to a position of a trainer, still in the same department. With her new role, she trained new single mothers how to sew clothes and dolls. Although she worked harder at her new exhausting role while still earning 120,000 shillings in two weeks, this was a more satisfying position. After one year as a trainer, she was promoted to work in quality control department, sort of as a quality supervisor, a position she still maintained at time of the interview. She earned a monthly salary of almost 300,000 (\$120).

With no support from anyone else, the salary is her sole livelihood allowing her to care for her three children, the children of her dead siblings and other dependants. Because her clan members would not allow her to construct a house on her father’s land, she was forced to buy a piece of land in Pader (home district). But because Pader is distant and remote, she planned to purchase another piece of land near Gulu town and construct a family house on it. She also has plans to go back to school through the adult literacy system: —.I want to study however old I will be. My heart really wants to study and if I study, it is not to get big jobs or compete for better jobs, I just want to increase my knowledge...” Prossy revealed.

Unfortunately, such relative successful stories are not common in Acholi villages and towns. The participants had anticipated that learning tailoring would help them accomplish their dream of a better life for themselves (see also Caulter, 2009), but this has not been possible for most. The other nine women in the sample (in Kitgum trading centres) earned very little and irregular incomes from their tailoring practice and did not consider it as a reliable source of income (see also Annan *et al.*, 2008:22). Such discouraging findings show that tailoring skill in Uganda has had little impact on former girl soldiers' livelihoods.

Skills like tailoring were offered based on gendered ideas of what the women should do rather than on an assessment of their capacity or potential for generating meaningful income (see also Utas, 2005; MacKenzie, 2009a:212; Annan *et al.*, 2008:22). This resulted in an overabundance of women (abducted and non-abducted) trained in tailoring, diluting the worth of their skill. Without training in skills that have marketable value in communities, the participants have been forced to find alternatives for survival.

8.3.2 Brewing as a Source of Income

Among all the supplementary occupations the young women in the sample participated in, more than half of them were involved in brewing and distilling. This was not surprising, considering that brewing is the primary economic activity among the lowest income earning females in northern Uganda (see Annan *et al.*, 2008:13). Although Acholi women brewed in the past (see Girling, 1960; Atkinson, 1994:60), it was usually a subsidiary rather than the main or sole activity which is widely encountered today. Young women in their early and mid-twenties are increasingly brewing and distilling for survival. This not only demonstrates alcohol's widespread use in the region, but the increasing dependency on cash in rural areas. It also shows women's desperation to earn a living for themselves or as contributors to family incomes.

As Evaline's story demonstrates (Table 8.2),¹⁴⁵ brewing is popular in Acholi because it is reasonably profitable, does not require a lot of skill and financial capital and can be carried out at home, alongside domestic tasks and child care (see also Annan *et al.*, 2008:13). Only a small amount of money is needed to purchase yeast and buy or/and rent distilling equipment. The activity can be done on an individual account and no licence is needed to produce or sell/supply

¹⁴⁵ Interview, CM 43, Lukung, November, 2012

alcohol. However, this does not mean that everywoman can participate in this economic activity. Those who are completely unable to secure any money to access inputs and equipment are limited in their participation (Annan *et al.*, 2008:13). The participants that had brewing as their main source of income were economically better off than those who desired, but were unable, to participate in brewing. Although brewing makes a relatively positive contribution to young women's incomes, it is still difficult to save enough money from it. Evaline shared her experience:

The business [brewing] can best be described by the losses that I usually incur. It is very rare that it has paid me well. A good return ranges slightly above 10,000 or 15,000 Uganda shillings. And it is part of this money that I save in the Village Savings and Loan Associations while the rest is used in sustaining the business running and providing food for the family as well. The challenge is money earned through the sale of alcohol can never be saved into meaningful accumulation.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶Interview, CM50

Table 8.3: Brewing as the quickest way to generate cash—Evaline’s Story

Twenty four year old Evaline was eleven years old when she was abducted in 1998. After 12 years in captivity, she returned to her village in 2010 with three children (a boy and two girls). She missed out on the skill training offered by the humanitarian agencies. When she returned to her village in Lamwo district, she first relied on her amnesty money to support herself and the children. She invested the balance in a restaurant business. Set up in a village trading centre (former camp), she earned about Ugandan Shillings 50,000 a month. The business was the breadwinner for her family. It footed all household bills and other related costs. Because of these high expenditures, the business did not survive for long. After two months, Evaline had no money left and she closed the restaurant. She then relied on her mother’s brewing business to survive until she got married.

Her husband is illiterate and unemployed. He does odd jobs to earn money. For two years, his family has been involved in clan land wrangles and their household is not able to grow food. They buy most of their food or exchange their labour for food. Evaline experiences severe chest pains and chronic headaches and cannot do much digging in exchange for food. She only maintains a small garden behind her house where she grows a few leafy vegetables to supplement their diet. She also depends on brewing to generate money to contribute to the family budget. The money she collects from brewing is spent on buying soap, salt, food and other basic needs. She mainly brews Waragi (local gin) and Kwete. Depending on the availability of brewing requirements, Evaline brews about 10 Litres of waragi a month and earns around 10,000 Shillings profits from it. It is much harder and expensive to brew enough Kwete, _the biggest challenge is getting the different components I need. For instance maize flour is scarce and slightly expensive on the market. I brew twice a month. However the number of times sometimes depends on availability of the components including the drums for fermenting and other equipment for brewing which I have to hire from others. For instance it is on hold right now.’

Dependence on Brewing Affects Peasant farming Activities...

In the past, women spent most of their time fulfilling their domestic and farming roles (see Girling, 1960:190–91). The tradition of farming as an obligation for households and individuals has been weakened. Unlike in the past, where housewives maintained three or more cultivation fields (Girling, 1960:190), today it is done on a much smaller scale (monoculture gardens of less than an acre close to their homes). Although the diminishing communal work groups/teams and lack of means to hire young men or an ox-plough to cultivate the fields constrains agricultural

productivity (Annan *et al.*, 2008:12), there is also increasing ambivalence towards agriculture in general. The participants allocated less time to agriculture and instead spent more time and efforts on domestic chores, brewing or/and doing other subsidiary occupations. Domestic chores occupy women's lives more than any other activity (Annan *et al.*, 2008:9; Artkinson, 1994) and this is severe for child mothers (abductees and non). Two of the participants in FGDs, both older women, had this to say:

What I am seeing oppressing these young women in our households is workload. We older women here [group discussion] know this. We tend to leave household works to them yet they have their kids and problems to sort. But because we know that such a young woman has nowhere else to go, she will do all the work you give her. This is making life difficult for many of them because they cannot imagine any other way out to take care of themselves and the children.¹⁴⁷

The younger women in families are seen as still healthy and able to do a lot of work and so issues of feeding the family and other things like house chores, it is the young women who do them.¹⁴⁸

For a society that is strongly differentiated in gender roles, such young women are spending their youthful life doing domestic work and rearing children.

The participants claimed that the non-existent incomes from their agricultural activities were forcing them to abandon/neglect their primary livelihood. However, the fact that many of them prefer residing in towns to remote villages indicates reduced interest in pursuing the hard life of farming. Many would rather venture into the alternative ways of earning a living that the towns offer. This reluctant attitude among the youth to participate in agriculture is noticeable throughout most trading centres (some were originally camps) where many have sought to stay, hoping to secure a source of income. Although most people in Acholi are still subsistence agriculturalists, large numbers of youth are moving to towns and trading centres to do business or for employment. This is understandable, because life in rural areas is increasingly becoming dependent on cash, and youths are therefore looking for strategies that bring in more money than agriculture.

¹⁴⁷Participant, FGD01.

¹⁴⁸Participant, FGD02.

...And Reinforces Social Stigma

Brewing exposes female returnees (and other young women) to further social stigma and abuse in the community. Often, their brew is consumed on credit and when they demand to be paid, they are abused and stigmatised on the grounds of their early motherhood and abduction. Further action may create relationship strains between them and other community members. Some participants, particularly those who were not married, were often insulted and accused by older women of trying to snatch their husbands under the pretext of demanding brew money. In Acholi, and indeed in other parts of Uganda, producing and selling alcohol is associated with 'prostitution'; for instance, many women selling alcohol in central and western Ugandan villages commonly have failed marriages or are single mothers. They are frequently stigmatised and assumed to be sleeping with some of their customers. They are seen as potential carriers of the HIV virus and/or other sexually transmitted diseases.

The trend and attitude in Acholi is slightly different: many of the brewers and distillers are respected *mego* ('mothers/older women'). However, young women joining and hoping to earn a living through this economic activity are not accorded the same respect. They are viewed as *Malaya* ('prostitutes'), with suspicion of being promiscuous and willing to have sex with the male customers. The fact that alcohol is produced and sold near/in their homes exposes them to further sexual harassment. Turning down sexual advances from their male customers may instigate stigmatisation. Formerly abducted girls not only have to put up with the stigma of having been part of the LRA, but have a 'young female alcohol seller' stigma exacerbating their reintegration problems.

Regardless of these problems and risks associated with brewing, the activity remains popular among low income earning young women. Since they brew to generate cash to meet their basic needs, if they were to access larger amounts of capital, it is likely that they would forego the activity for more cash-intensive, less stigmatising and more profitable economic activities. However, when girls and young women cannot get remunerative employment, are unable to produce enough from cultivation, and lack security to access loans, brewing and distilling remains the easiest and most accessible option for earning a living. The cycle continues in the younger generation; where girls are unable to continue with school and therefore cannot secure employment, brewing seems to await them.

8.4 Linking Ability to Earn Income to Reintegration

Formerly abducted girls' participation in supplementary livelihood activities alongside household chores and cultivation can be interpreted as a positive sign—adopting and understanding the economic dynamics of their communities. With life increasingly becoming dependent on cash and with changing gender roles, they have to work hard to keep up with the economic dynamics of their society. They are shrewd, determined fighters who scramble to feed their families each day by engaging in any affordable economic activities, however risky and stigmatising they may be. Such ability and courage to rise above their past and be resourceful for their families should be recognised and appreciated.

Their monthly incomes ranged from 10,000 to 300,000 (\$4-120), with the majority earning less than 100,000 (\$40). Most of them earned far less than 1,250 Uganda shillings (US\$0.75) a day. Such findings show the level of serious shortage of income that defines the participants' economic reintegration. These income patterns are commonly found among the poorest young women in northern Uganda (see Ahikire *et al.*, 2010:34; Annan *et al.*, 2008). Using the researcher's judgment, the study categorises the participants into three economic cohorts based on their incomes, any investments (gardens, domestic animals or land), and ability to hire labour or rent land. The categories are very-needy (A), poor (B), and above-poor (C). Save for Prossy, who, based on her remunerative employment, falls in category C, the rest fall under the two poorest economic groups of A and B. These are people experiencing failed economic reintegration, unable to regularly generate reasonable income and who therefore depend on their families and husbands for economic survival.

Participants in categories B and C who are able to provide/contribute to the family income are more likely to acquire a position and respect in their marriage, family hierarchy and community. Earning some money entitles them to appreciation and favour in the household and grants them a place in the decision-making process. Phrases like we [husband and wife] share everything, we plan together, we solve problems together were often used in interviews to illustrate their approved position in the family hierarchy. With this improvement and sense of economic empowerment, women's life situations in households change for the better (see also Angeleles, 2012:8). They increasingly participate in decisions concerning children's welfare, family

welfare; income, expenses, business and farming, among others (see also Ahikire *et al.*, 2010:21).

With some level of economic empowerment, families also start sympathising and protecting formerly abducted girls from stigmatisation. Women whose families count on their finances have their stigma overlooked and receive admiration for upholding their families in such difficult economic times. They are frequently used as a point of reference for non-abducted peers who are blamed for not contributing much to their families. For example, a woman like Prossy, with a stable job, is viewed differently by neighbours and community members. Her financial status lessens the stigma and suspicious attitudes often directed towards returnees.

Another extremely important benefit is that this economic achievement helps formerly abducted girls to take charge of their life situations. Their stories show that financially supporting or contributing to their families uplifts their status, pride, confidence and self-esteem. This empowerment puts them in a position where they are able to even compare their social and economic situations with their non-abductees peers:

You find that, those who have been at home here; they didn't run anywhere, they have their land but their children are not in school. With all that happened to me, I am struggling to take care of my family, I am living better than them.¹⁴⁹

The way I (Prossy) see my life situation, there are some people who studied but do not have what to do, no jobs, nothing. Sometimes seeing such people, I feel sorry and sympathetic for them and feel like giving them a helping hand, but then no much capacity. Such people were not abducted but do not have anything in their lives; it is their physical body that is staying at home. But then for me, I go to work every day and get money. And that is why I find my life situation better off than for those who were not abducted. They are the one who studied and supposed to help/support you [former abductee] but instead it is you to help them...¹⁵⁰

Some studies, such as that of Ahikire and others, argue that because almost all women were in IDP camps during the war, the observable urban/rural differences between them have since blurred (Ahikire *et al.*, 2010:26). However current findings do not entirely support this analysis. Based on the present sample and experience of working in both settings (towns and villages), there is an apparent difference between these two categories of women. Women in remote

¹⁴⁹Interview, CM58.

¹⁵⁰Interview, CM55.

villages do not participate in as many cash generating activities as those in towns or trading centres; they have pretty much resumed the pre-conflict gender roles.

More confidence and a degree of independence gives women who earn some income control over their life situations: for example, Prossy left her three year stigmatising marriage because she, her children and other dependents could survive on her salary. She did not need to rely on the livelihood provided in her bad marriage and financial support from her womanising and stigmatising husband. Through earning an income and thus feeling physically and emotionally empowered, formerly abducted girls find it necessary and possible to negotiate their position and resist intimate partner/cohabiters violence (see also Angelele, 2012:8). Studies have shown that women with greater autonomy and control over resources and reproduction are more protected from violence (see Jejeebhoy& Cook, 1997; Jejeebhoy, 1998; Levinson, 1989). Therefore, for the formerly abducted girls in remote villages that depend on marriages and husbands for survival, taking a decision to walk away from a bad marriage remains unlikely for many of them.

8.5 No Stable Livelihood, No Successful Reintegration

As we saw in Chapter Three, the literature suggests that successful reintegration is the continuation of livelihoods and social relationships; either to the life led before recruitment or life comparable to never abducted peers. The study participants defined successful reintegration in line with cordial relationship with community members and ability to financially sustain themselves. Anybody with a negative relationship or is totally dependent on family or husband to meet their basic needs, their reintegration should be looked at as having failed. One of them highlighted some of the factors determining successful reintegration in this vein,

For me a good and successful reintegration is being able to live in harmony with other people which come from doing onto others what you want done onto you. When there is no stigma I am facing that makes it difficult for community members to identify me as a former abductee. The other factor is my participation into community projects such as farming activities and businesses without any discrimination based on my past experiences. Basically, I will say I have successfully reintegrated when the stigma stops and I am no longer begging people for food, soap, clothes...¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹Interview, CM 25.

With many of the participants still facing serious stigmatisation in their communities, their social reintegration cannot be described as successful. Also, if successful reintegration is being like everyone else, then the economic situation of almost all the women under study cannot be considered a success. They are caught in the back-breaking village and trading centre poverty that grips many of their poorest non-abducted peers (see Annan *et al.*, 2009). Although many of them have been reintegrating for a number of years now, life situations have not manifested into what would be described as a progressive economic reintegration. Absolute/extreme poverty is still the defining feature of their day-to-day lives where they are as desperate for basic needs as was the case in the camps.

Successful economic reintegration requires individuals to be literate or semi-literate, healthy and able to work. The formerly abducted girls have reduced livelihood resources in terms of: human (no education, knowledge and skills; poor health; suffer psychologically); social (low social status; self-esteem issues; stigma; relationship/marriage problems; marginalisation; no strong networks and connections); natural (limited access and ownership of land); and lack of financial capital (no security). The overall lack of financial capital is a hindrance to effective livelihood strategies, leaving the majority clinging on to peasant farming even when they are unable to survive on it. Even those who earn a few shillings a day or month are unable to save it because they need more than that income just to stay alive.

Stigmatisation further limits their ability to explore their social capital (community networking trust, cohesion and inclusion) where they would obtain information and other resources, find social support and have any possible chance to influence community decision making. Stigma significantly hinders their socialisation and networking, which would be helpful in achieving a sustainable livelihood and reintegration.

Their reduced resources and strategies leave them with extremely condensed chances of achieving a sustainable livelihood (reduced poverty, increased incomes, reduced vulnerability, resilience, etc.). With their subsidiary livelihood activities unsustainable and pushing them further to the margins, they lack food reserves or savings to rely on in a time of need. The absence of such a safety net results in their increased vulnerability to future disasters and risks.

8.6 Concluding Remarks

This Chapter has attempted to show the participants' lack of assets and capabilities to generate sufficient income. With their livelihood realities, we can see why many young women remain in bad marriages to survive. Although they try to make their life situations bearable by engaging in one or more supplementary livelihood options, they are unable to save enough and invest in serious business activities to generate more income. With extreme poverty in a patriarchal society, the participants lack the ability (by themselves) to get out of this scarcity trap. Unless economic initiatives for female youth in northern Uganda are designed and effectively implemented to target formerly abducted girls, many of them will continue to survive by brewing and doing domestic or manual work to survive. Such economic activities affect their already stigmatised position and expose them to exploitation by those who hire them (see also Annan *et al.*, 2006, 2008). Also, with their poor health, participating in such least-income-earning and back-breaking activities may not be possible in the long run.

CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

With information collected from 57 formerly abducted women, this thesis has discussed the central themes in their social and economic lives. It traced their movements from the time they were abducted; lives and experiences of soldiering in captivity; and their lives at the time of interviews. The findings demonstrate that their experiences as associates of an armed group have become central to their identity, and it is through this lens that they view and experience the civilian world.

The rich information shared during fieldwork provides contemporary knowledge on the situation of formerly abducted girls in Acholi, knowledge which is contextual and circumstantial but not unique. The findings give a critical insight into the degree of complexity and diversity of issues that these young women experienced and continue to experience in their villages as they try to rebuild their lives. Although these challenges are shared by their non-abducted peers, they remain severe for formerly abducted girls. To ensure the participants' voices were included and recognised, the findings have been presented with quotations from interviews while also including the author's experience, perspectives, reflections and knowledge gained through interacting with them and perusing the literature.

Considering the small size of the sample, the study makes no claim to the generalisability of the stories analysed, although comparisons are made with related findings elsewhere.

9.1 Recapitulation

This thesis presents findings of research into, the social and economic life of formerly abducted girls. Interviews have revealed that the major themes include: physical and mental scars of abduction and life in captivity, stigmatisation, marriage complexities and economic hardship. To explore the significance of these central themes, subsequent sub-questions were posed. The first was: What are the participants' abduction experiences? During in-depth interviews, the participants were asked to look back at the events of their recruitment and lives in captivity. All of them were forcefully recruited, with the majority still adolescents and teenagers at the time.

The data explain the process of becoming a soldier with the LRA, including surviving the day of abduction, journey to Sudan, initiation/purification, military training and, finally, deployment for rebel activities. This process was intense and the participants were subjected to physical and psychological torture, oppression and brutality which forced them to rethink, review and forget their pre-abduction lives and relationships. They were instead forced to adopt and believe in a new reality, where violence was not only acceptable but the order of the day. To survive the day of abduction and then life in captivity, to fit in and work with the armed group, they had to adopt the reality and stigmatising identity of ‘rebel’ without questioning or reflecting on what the consequences would be. Interviews also show how forced marriage in the armed group was organised. Marriage in the LRA was an important aspect of the women’s military experience and, as discussed in this thesis, that part of their background continues to negatively impact their day-to-day lives.

The majority (65%) of the women in our sample continue to emphasise the negative elements of life in captivity. They claim that ‘bush’ life was never good and there was nothing they enjoyed or learnt while with the armed group. On the other hand, a smaller number (35%) perceived some abduction experiences as positive. They identified personal attributes or lessons learned from their military experiences that they owe to their soldiering in captivity. These life experiences added some value to their capacity to live in a ‘normal’ world, taught them the art of perseverance in the face of difficulties and how to overcome these. Having developed an independent, hardworking, courageous, resolute, and self-reliant attitude towards life and survival in captivity, the women find it difficult to subsequently renounce such feelings of independence and power following their return to civilian life. For example, women who stayed longest in captivity and were exposed to suffering, killing and mortal threats for the duration of their stay, have been left feeling unnaturally ‘strong hearted’ or courageous. They are not easily moved when something extremely bad happens. One of them had this to say:

...in times of grief, I see them [non abductees] mourn for the dead in ways that I can’t. I am strong hearted which I think I owe to my military experiences where I saw several dead people that I am no longer moved that much by the death of other people. In terms of fear of darkness, I can move any time of the night unlike many young women in this village who cannot.¹⁵²

¹⁵² Interview, CM47, Lokung sub county, Lamwo district, 15/12/2012.

While to an ordinary person, life in captivity may be seen as entirely negative or bizarre, returnees have been changed by their experience, in ways which they feel and take as positive. Their stories portray a sense that being former abductees cannot be something that they relegate to the past, as it is part of their present-day identities and day-to-day lives.

The second sub-question investigated was: How did the participants relate to their families and communities when they first returned home? And is this relationship improving or deteriorating over time? A lengthy war like that of northern Uganda leaves families and communities disrupted. When abducted persons returned home, many found themselves in different family structures headed by parents, grandparents, relatives or siblings. Similar to other studies, the findings challenge what is commonly presented in the reintegration literature, that most formerly abducted girls are rejected by their families. Many of our participants were initially accepted back by the remaining family members and went on to live in a cordial relationship with everyone. However, during the subsequent months or years, this relationship changed. This applies to their relationship to the wider community as well.

Although it has been years since most of the women in our sample returned to their villages, they still face challenges in relating to other villagers. The findings illustrate complex situations such individuals find themselves in. They recognised and acknowledged their families and communities as important resources for reinsertion and long-term reintegration. They however also detailed their hindrances/barriers in terms of stigmatisation (both support and negative attitudes happen concurrently). We have seen that stigmatisation (tension, suspicion and negative attitudes) in Acholi—as identified by previous studies on initial reintegration—is still prevalent and hampering long-term reintegration. In their villages, formerly abducted individuals live with their physical deformities and the shame of having been part of the enemy for years, and are seen as transgressing and deviating from cultural norms. Although interviews indicate stigmatisation was more prevalent while people resided in IDP camps, it is still quite persistent in villages. Stigma promotion is used to set the abductees apart from the normal social strata: stigmatisation remains the greatest problem in their reintegration progress, hindering their relationships and marriage prospects.

Although some participants acknowledged that stigmatisation has reduced ever since they left the camps, the improvement in treatment appears to occur through their efforts to fit into the

villages. Through the ways they relate with others, they are proving to the villagers that they are good people who need to be respected and appreciated like their non-abducted peers. It is still, however, difficult to break free of stigmatisation—forcing many of them to live disconnected lives and find comfort in isolation. Their physical world is largely confined to the settings where they reside and work. Faced with resentment, formerly abducted individuals can only cope with stigmatisation by maintaining silence as they try to live a ‘normal’ life, ‘behaving well’ and being respectful of others. They live with stigma promotion as part of their daily lives. Another category lives in isolation, avoiding or making no effort to interact with other people. At times when stigmatisation becomes unbearable, some are forced to relocate to completely new environments to start over. However, as discussed in this thesis, isolation, silence, secrecy and relocation coping mechanisms are not protective enough.

Apart from negatively impacting their behaviour, stigmatisation is a source of emotional distress and low self-esteem for the formerly abducted. It not only inflames a sense of paranoia as they feel people in the family and social surroundings are constantly scrutinising them, it reminds them of their lives with the LRA, where they were at all times monitored and their actions closely watched and questioned by the commanders. There is an urgent need for the villages to shift/change their attitudes/perceptions of formerly abducted individuals and support them to achieve successful reintegration.

Since stigmatisation is a persistent challenge, it needs persistent external responses. There is urgent need to address the structural causes of these people’s stigmatization, marginalization, discrimination and vulnerability (e.g legislation on this minority group rights, anti-stigmatization and anti-discrimination campaigns). If not adequately addressed, individual rights will continue to be violated through prevalent stigma promotion. Eventually, formerly abducted people will have to contend with negative stereotypes and prejudices based on resentment, including: stain (‘they killed and are polluted’); fear (‘they are dangerous and uncontrollable’); and jealousy (‘they are benefiting from their abduction experiences’). This will continue to be extended to their marriage prospects and attempts to form important networks that can benefit them as they seek to survive in post-conflict Acholi. There will be no successful reintegration for this category of youth if a barrier/wall is maintained between them and other people. Stigmatisation is steadily pushing them further to the margins of society.

Regardless of their different reintegration levels and achievements, all the women in our sample wish to be seen as living in the same way as their non-abductee peers, are consistently behaving as respectable, law abiding Acholi and Ugandans. They aspire to earn a decent living by generating money, being married and taking care of their families. Asked about their life goals, none of them identified a personal goal that could be interpreted as socially unacceptable. Generally, their identification with the societal norms is no different from that of other young women in Acholi. All they desire is acceptance, support and a chance to try to achieve their successful reintegration.

The last sub-question asked was: How have the study participants reintegrated in economic terms? Evidence shows that recruitment into armed groups leads to human resource deficit. According to the interviews, no or low education and skills limit the participants' choices of livelihood strategies. Due to difficulty in accessing land or/and poor health, their participation in crop production is limited. These challenges, coupled with poverty, force them to venture into other supplementary livelihood strategies to ensure they and their families are provided for.

While many of the women in our sample have not achieved desired economic reintegration outcomes, including increased incomes, over time they adapt to the local economic dynamics and become active agents of their own economic well-being. Regardless of limitations, they become functional, able and caring young adults towards their families and villages, impacting their surroundings through these livelihood contributions. While their specific vulnerabilities must be recognised, so too must their agency, determination and resilience. Their economic reintegration experiences demonstrate their strength and courage as they guarantee their survival to their families.

In the long run, as demonstrated by Prossy's experience (Table 8.1), the more empowered and financially independent these women become, the fewer economic problems and stigmatisation they will face. The key to reducing stigma promotion remains in enhancing their ability to earn a stable income. However, this remains difficult considering that this category of youth is the least educated, has health complications, and resides in the remotest areas of northern Uganda. Given their inability to take on back-breaking economic activities, there is an urgent need to economically empower them. Also, considering that tailoring and other economic reintegration

programmes have not benefited most of them directly, more meaningful and realistic economic programmes targeting these young women in northern Uganda are sorely needed.

Although, in terms of experiences, the 57 women interviewed have much in common, this should not give an impression that they are a homogeneous group. Their heterogeneity is the first characteristic that policy makers, development actors and researchers should take into account. Close diagnoses of the life situations of former girl abductees should allow accurate understanding of their reintegration progress and ongoing challenges. To reach out to this category of youth, there is a need to first understand and acknowledge their age, experience, perspectives, challenges, worries, aspirations, motivations, skills, and hopes for the future. They are not only a bunch of victims that need saving. They are active agents whose voices matter and need to be heard. They are ready to work, both individually and as a group. Although they are too poor to overcome their problems on their own, they are still hard working, and determined to make something of themselves and their children. They are realistic about their circumstances and how they might be improved it. Therefore, to know what initiatives could work for them, their voices and experiences (and those of other young women) should be given priority when designing programmes to reduce their poverty and vulnerability.

9.2 The Struggle Continues

Although at the time of our interviews, many had been home for 6–10 years, they had not been able to achieve successful reintegration. With peace returning to northern Uganda, there is a feeling that everyone is going through a tough time as the region is trying to recover from the effects of a long war. While formerly abducted girls are not expected to complain but to rise to the challenges of day-to-day living along with the rest of the population, which they in fact do, they are still highly vulnerable and often marginalized. Because the majority were not rejected by their families and communities when they first returned home, are not involved in violence, they are assumed to have successfully reintegrated. At the time of this study, many had indeed attempted to participate in community reintegration initiatives like marriage and income generating activities. They were taking care of their children either by themselves or with the help of other people like their families and partners. However, they still faced stigmatisation and unfairness, and inability to fully engage in farming or earn money through stable means. They continue to struggle to find a place back inside their families and villages, a difficult task that

cannot be done in a short time and without help. With lack of recognizable external help say from their government, this minority group in post conflict northern Uganda is facing long term reintegration challenges by themselves, with minimum assistance from their families and villages.

Although they have made slow progress with their reintegration, most women in the current sample still have hopes for a better future. Women with no hopes and aspirations are those who are, or perceive themselves to be, the very worst off. Stuck in their abduction past, they do not think of the future or do not think they have one—only God knows my fate/my future‘ was a common comment for some of them. Without earning any regular income, they depend entirely on others to survive. These women feel paralysed, with no sense of a future. Most of our participants, however, have plans and hopes, and thus a sense of a better future. Those who earn an income, however small, feel they can improve their situation. Although still faced with obstacles to their complete reintegration, they are positive towards life. Throughout the world, it is argued that the central drive for women’s struggle to earn a living is to attain a better life for their children (Engle, 1986). Similarly, the participants’ driving force and motivation to provide for their children are strong. Although they feel they lost valuable time and energy in captivity, they continue to work hard to ensure their children are provided for and can live a better life. Through educating and empowering their children, the mothers look forward to better life situations. However, given their limited resources, without external assistance to educate the children, this assumed better‘ future will be difficult to achieve.

The post-war period is often assumed to be a time of opportunity and progress for women (and other previously marginalised groups). During and after a conflict, women take up new roles and positions of power at the household and community levels. Because of this, the post war period is regarded as a time to re-negotiate and reconfigure women’s status and positions (Handrahan, 2004; Barth, 2002). However, the findings and literature show that ex-female combatants often return to their traditional roles and ways of living (particularly in villages). If they act otherwise, for example in exercising the power earned through their militarisation experience, they face challenges in relating with other people. Thus, to fit in to the host families and villages, they have to renounce these experiences. They have to do this because they are aware that their military experience is not accepted and appreciated by people in their new/old surroundings.

Formerly abducted girls resuming their traditional roles and ways of life are encouraged and aided by reintegration and other post-conflict development programmes. This is further reinforced by their families. For example, the line ‘forget your abduction past and start living like a normal person’, was a common way family and villagers advised such young women. If they resisted and took evident pride in their experience, they risked being branded ‘unnatural’, ‘unwomanly’, ‘unmarriageable’ etc. However, this does not mean that there is no friction between the reintegrating individuals and their host villages. As host villagers demand that the women become ‘normal’ and ‘like us’, the women resist (e.g. standing up to their stigmatisers or reporting them to the authorities, marrying their bush husbands, abandoning ‘bad’ marriages, maintaining silence and isolation, among others). But on a personal level, this is an unequal battle; the women have to struggle within this hostile system so as to make ends meet or else they lose the battle for survival.

9.3 Missing theme

Although the academic literature and media coverage led this author to expect widespread feelings of resentment or/and calls for judicial recompense during interviews with the women, she encountered little in the way of such sentiment. The aim of participants at the time of our interviews was to be allowed to fit in socially and to be able to sustain themselves and their families. The women were silent on feelings of revenge either toward the men who had abducted, raped and tortured them, or the people who had stigmatised them in the villages. Most did not demand justice or for their abusers and stigmatisers to be punished (even when they knew the whereabouts of their bush husbands). They did not ask for, or expect any form of compensation for their suffering and loss. This silence can be attributed to a number of reasons, including:

- They simply want to forget the past and focus on what is more important to them now (acceptance, marriage, livelihood etc.);
- Seeking revenge or calling for justice and compensation will bring them (and their children) back into the limelight, which will ignite more public stigmatisation, resentment and jealousy;

- Seeking revenge may have greater and longer-lasting repercussions for the children than their mothers; and
- Considering their illiterate status, particularly in the villages, the women do not know how their human rights have been and continue to be violated.

9.4 Areas for Further Research

The sample size in this study was ideal for gaining an insight into the complex war, life in captivity and reintegration experiences of research participants. There is scope to expand the exploration of the core themes covered in Chapters 4-7 of this thesis to other groups of formerly abducted individuals, including young men; women who occupied high ranks in the LRA; women who were actually empowered by their experiences in captivity; and individuals who relocated to larger towns. Research among these groups should provide equally diverse and rich understandings of their lived realities to complement those revealed by the present study. For example, during the course of this female-focused study, it was realised that there are no comprehensive studies of formerly abducted boys' marriage and livelihood experiences, to compare with the everyday realities of the young women studied.

The question of why the villagers continue to stigmatise formerly abducted individuals when it is common knowledge that they were forcefully recruited is a very interesting one that could be expanded even more. There is a need to explore and profile the stigmatisers. From the interviews, it was not clear who stigmatises former abductees the most; could it be older women, young women (peers), young men, older men or children, and why? The findings also highlight the dilemma some women face, where they would want to move to a place where they are anonymous to avoid stigmatisation, but because of tight social ties which they depend on to survive, are unable to do so. This is an interesting issue which merits further research, probably with emphasis on differences between women and men—is it easier, for example, for men to move somewhere where they will be anonymous? And, finally, linking stigmatisation and marriage, the findings show that former abductees do not marry each other. If they did, this would probably diminish some of the stigma in the marriage and perhaps allow them to be more open about their experiences. The question of why they do not marry each other can be explored further. Lastly, in terms of sensitisation efforts and sympathising with former abductees, never abducted young women and men are a category to target if stigmatisation is to be addressed in

Acholi. First, the focus should be on exploring whether and how young men and women offer practical support to former abductees, thereby contributing to their rehabilitation and healing. Such support can then be promoted with the aim of challenging and reducing stigmatisation.

There is also a need for longitudinal studies using insights from development, sociology, economics and anthropology to further demonstrate how returnee experiences evolve over time, say over a 15 to 20 year period. For example, by tracing the personal journeys of the women over time, changes in their reintegration outcomes can be explored at depth. It may be that, despite a longer period of reintegration, their social and economic situations remain the same. However, based on current findings, this is unlikely. Considering their situation when they first returned home, there is a tremendous shift, particularly with respect to their economic reintegration experiences. This suggests that some, after many more years reintegrating, will demonstrate considerable progress in their social and economic fortunes. But, even though there will be different and varying perspectives on long-term reintegration, even among this group, respondents will still be in a position to provide more information on the dynamics and outcomes of successful reintegration. Such information will be particularly useful to inform sustainable livelihood planning for women who, having participated directly in armed conflict, had also successfully exited armed groups waging war, and were seeking to rebuild their lives.

Finally, the majority of participants (n=40) were mothers of a total of 59 surviving children born in captivity. The issue of these children, both in Acholi and elsewhere in northern Uganda, needs urgent research attention. Very little is known about how these children's integration is unfolding. Considering that many of them are approaching adolescence, a detailed diagnosis of their unique and complex needs remains crucial. Bearing in mind that most LRA fighters were/are Acholi, there is a need to understand how children born to abducted girls from other groups are treated. For example, does stigmatisation manifest itself differently among these other communities? Furthermore, as noted in Chapter Five, mothers often gave their children stigmatising names: how has this impacted on the children's integration? Also, a deeper analysis of mother-child relationships is needed, as research into how this relationship impacts the long-term reintegration of mothers is still very scant. We also need, finally, to understand how the natures of such filial relationships vary with the specific circumstances of conception: forced

marriages (where the mother knows the father); gang rapes in armed groups; rape in IDP camps; and everyday rape in the community.

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Appendix A: Uganda Timeline since 1962

1962 October 9	Uganda ends Britain rule and gains independence with the Buganda king, Edward Mutesa II, as president,
1966	Obote under Uganda People's Congress (UPC) becomes President of Uganda. A new constitution gave him and abolishes all tribal kingdoms. This ended Buganda's autonomy
1971 January 25	Obote is deposed in a coup led by Idi Amin, Army chief
1972-73	Uganda engages in border clashes with Tanzania
1978-9	Amin is toppled by a coalition of Uganda National Liberation Front, Tanzania forces and Ugandans in exile.
1980	Obote is re-elected for president (Obote II)
1981 Feb	Yoweri Museveni launches a guerrilla war under National Resistance Army (NRA). This five-year bush war took place in central Uganda ("Luwero triangle").
1985	Obote is toppled and replace by General Tito Okello
1986	Okello is deposed by Museveni's National Resistance Army (NRA). The former is declared president on 29 January 1986. Many Acholi and Langi soldiers fled to northern Uganda and Sudan
1986-1987	Formation of the Uganda Peoples Democratic Army-UPDA (the remnants of Uganda's National Liberation Army-UNLA)
1987- 1988	Alice Auma "Akwenya" launches an insurgency, Holy Spirit Movement. She is defeated and she flees to Kenya
1988-1989	Severino Likoya (father of Alice Auma) engages in conflict
Late 1988	Joseph Kony, takes over the fight in northern Uganda
1988-1994	Formation and operations of Lord's Resistance Army, under Joseph Kony
1993/4	Khartoum begins to provide direct support to the LRA. In return, the LRA supports Sudan's war against the Sudan People's Liberation Army in southern Sudan.
1994 March	The LRA steps up ambushes and abductions in the north
1994	First attempts of Peace talks between the government and LRA (known as "Bigombe talks")
1995-	LRA fighters are reported to have set up bases in neighbouring states: the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and southern Sudan.
1995 April	relations between Uganda and Sudan break off each accusing the other of backing hostile rebel groups
1995	New constitution legalizing political parties but maintains the ban on political activity for more five years.

1996	Acholi residents flee villages due to LRA's violence. Forced displacement starts
1996 Oct 10	The LRA abducts 139 girls from a Aboke girls' (run by Catholic Italian nuns)
1999 May 14	President Museveni offered amnesty to rebel leader Joseph Kony, head of the Sudanese backed Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Members of the LRA were included in the offer.
2001	
April 2002	The U.S. government places the LRA on a list of terrorist organizations. Uganda and Sudan relations are restored. Khartoum gives Ugandan army the right to pursue LRA into Sudanese territory.
2002-2004	UPDF launches "Operation Iron Fist 1&2" aimed at wiping out the LRA for good.
2003	
	Pres. Museveni requests that the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate crimes against humanity in northern Uganda.
2005 October 2005	ICC issues arrest for Joseph Kony and his other four LRA commanders.
	The LRA shifts its base of operations to northeastern Congo, underscoring the regional dimensions of the conflict.
2006 July 14	The government and the LRA launch peace negotiations in Juba, southern Sudan.
2006 August	LRA declares ceasefire for proposed peace talks, held throughout 2006 and 2007
2007-2015	
	Museveni initiates the Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan (PRDP) to promote reconstruction and development efforts in northern Uganda
2008 February 23	Government and LRA sign permanent ceasefire in Sudan. However, in November Kony fails to show up to sign a peace agreement.
2008 December	"Operation Lightning Thunder" a joint military offensive against LRA in DRC is launched by Uganda, DRC and Sudan.
December 19, 2011	A unit of US special forces arrives in the east of the Central African Republic to help fight the LRA

Appendix B: Location where individual and groups interviews were carried out

District	Sub-county	Participants	Number
Gulu	Gulu Municipality	Formerly abducted women	4
		Formerly abducted young men	3
		NGO Officer	1
		Reception centre officer	1
Kitgum	Kitgum Town Council	Formerly abducted women	15
		FGDs	4 (44 participants)
		Local women's leader	2
		Reception centre officer	2
	LabongAmida	Formerly abducted women	10
		FMDs	4 (17 participants)
		Local council leader	1
	Omiya Anyima	Formerly abducted women	16
		FMD	1 (11 participants)
	<u>Lamwo</u>	Lokung	Formerly abducted women
FGDs			2 (19 participants)
<u>Pader</u>	Pader Town Council	FGD	1 (11 participants)
		Reception centre officer	1
Total			170 Participants

Appendix C: Demographic Information for all the women¹⁵³

CM	Age at abduction	Length of abduction	Forcibly Married?	Bore child/ren	Age at time of interviews	Married?	How long?
CM01	16	6 years	yes	2	29		
CM02	9	4 years	yes	0	19		
CM03	12	4 years	yes	2	20		
CM04	12	4 years	yes	1	24		
CM05	9	7 years	yes	1	23		
CM06	11	10 years	yes	2	20		
CM07	15	don't know	yes	1	28		
CM08	12	6 years	yes	0	22		
CM09	10	7 years	yes	2 (1 died)	32		
CM10	10	5 years	no	0	22		
CM11	12	don't know	no	0	23		
CM12	13	9 years	yes	1	21		
CM13	13	9 years	yes	1	28		
CM14	19	3 Months	no	0	30		
CM15	11	don't know	yes	2	36		
CM16	11	6 years	yes	1	27		
CM17	13	9 years	yes	1	23		
CM18	13	8 years	yes	1	23		
CM19	14	3 months	yes	0	25		
CM20	6	3 years	yes	0	20		
CM21	13	3 years	yes	1	24		
CM22	14	don't know	yes	3 (1 died)	40		
CM23	13	3 years	yes	1	25		
CM24	11	5 years	yes	1	29		
CM25	14	7 years	yes	1	26		
CM26	30	3 Months	no	0	45		
CM27	15	1 year	yes	0	21		
CM28	13	6 years	yes	1	26		
CM29	17	4 years	yes	2	29		
CM30	13	1 year	yes	0	23		
CM31	15	2 years	yes	2	23		
CM32	11	8 years	yes	1 (died)	23		
CM33	14	7 years	yes	2	30		
CM34	19	3 years	yes	1	33		
CM35	11	8 years	yes	2	26		
CM36	8	7 years	yes	2	25		
CM37	14	8 years	yes	2	32		
CM38	13	6 years	yes	1	25		
CM39	15	2 years	yes	1	29		

¹⁵³ CM is for Child mother

CM40	9	9 years	yes	2	28
CM41	17	6 years	yes	1	27
CM42	13	4 years	no	0	25
CM43	11	12 year	no	3	23
CM44	14	2 years	yes	1 (left in the bush)	22
CM45	30	9 years	yes	2 Miscarriages	Don't know
CM46	30	2 years	no		43
CM47	13	8 years	yes	1	25
CM48	10	don't know	yes	1	26
CM49	12	don't know	yes	0	19
CM50	14	9 years	yes	2	38
CM51	9	don't know	yes (married twice)	2	19
CM52	12	don't know	yes	0	36
CM53	13	9 years	yes	1	23
CM54	20	4 years	yes	1 (died)	32
CM55	10	11 years	yes	1	28
CM56	14	7 years	yes	3	30
CM57	14	10 years	No	5 (1 died)	36