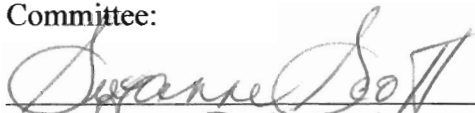


CHILD SOLDIERS IN THE LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY: FACTORS IN THE
REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION PROCESS


by

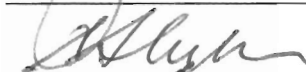
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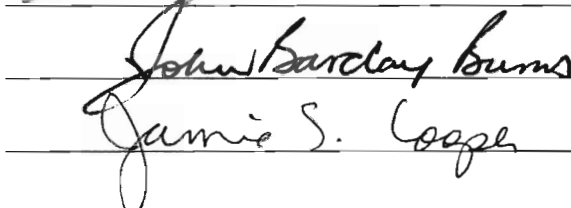


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Child Soldiers in the Lord's Resistance Army: Factors in the Rehabilitation and
Reintegration Process

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Arts at George Mason University

By

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ABSTRACT

CHILD SOLDIERS IN THE LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY: FACTORS IN THE REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION PROCESS

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George Mason University, 2008

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This thesis describes the rehabilitation and reintegration process for children who served as child soldiers in the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Northern Uganda. It examines the rehabilitation and reintegration process, arguing that a more clearly gendered approach should be in place because the current process does not adequately deal with the range of psychological effects or the particular kinds of traumas that the girls experience. Even though rehabilitation programs describe their programs as individualistic where girls' needs are addressed, there are many reasons why different rehabilitation and reintegration protocols should be in place for handling the differences for girls. This thesis examines the background of the conflict, modes of abduction and coercion into the LRA, the roles of the children in the LRA, and the ways they leave the rebel forces. This thesis serves as a reference and resource for individuals interested in the conflict in Northern Uganda and the complex rehabilitation and reintegration processes that follow.

Introduction

For twenty-two years, a war has raged in Northern Uganda, killing and forcing entire villages into Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps ostensibly to protect them from the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a dangerous rebel army whose focused efforts have left thousands dead and has displaced more than 1.5 million (UNICEF, 2008). Unfortunately, the people most vulnerable to the impacts of the war are most often those least responsible for perpetuating it (Resolve Uganda, 2007). The ravages of war and poverty disproportionately affect women and children. This is especially true in Uganda, where the LRA is largely responsible for the coordination and organization of the rebel forces, which are fighting the government and forming an insurgency that heavily recruits young people into their army. For years, children as young as five years old have been targeted by the LRA for use as soldiers. The LRA believe the ideal child is old enough to hold a gun and young enough to be easily controlled and manipulated into becoming cruel and ruthless fighters. Boys and girls alike are abducted or coerced into the rebel forces as child soldiers. A child soldier is a boy or girl under the age of 18, who is compulsorily, forcibly or voluntarily recruited or used in hostility by armed forces, paramilitaries, civil defence [sic] units or other armed groups" (Machel, 2001).

The conflict in Northern Uganda is not unique in their use of child soldiers. Singer explains that by the turn of the twenty-first century, child soldiers served in

significant numbers on every continent of the globe but Antarctica. They have become integral parts of both organized military units and nonmilitary but still violent political organizations, including rebel and terrorist groups. They serve a variety of roles including porters, spies, fighters, sexual slaves, and wives (Singer, 2005).

The war in Northern Uganda has greatly affected the people living in Gulu, Kitgum, Lira, and Pader districts. Since the Amnesty Act of 2002, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have directed many of their efforts towards the rehabilitation and reintegration of children who had previously served as child soldiers in the LRA and were returning home. This complex process is intended to transform child soldiers back into children or young adults, changing their mindset from a fighter to a civilian.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the gendered factors in the rehabilitation and reintegration of children who previously acted as child soldiers in the LRA in Northern Uganda. I argue that while their approach to rehabilitating and reintegrating is described as individualistic, the strongly gendered natures of the rehabilitation needs are not acknowledged. The research for this thesis draws from an interdisciplinary library of sources as well as information gathered during a three-week period in Gulu and Kitgum districts in Northern Uganda in spring 2008. I conducted interviews with ex-child soldiers, people who were greatly affected by the war, but had not personally been a part of the LRA armed forces, and individuals working in rehabilitation programs in Northern Uganda. The interviews were conducted without approval of the Human Subjects Review Board, however participants did sign consent forms, which informed them of the intentions of the study.

The thesis is divided into three main chapters. Chapter one focuses on the history and the root causes of the war in Northern Uganda. I highlight key players in the various conflicts that have resulted in twenty-two years of war such as the reigns of Milton Obote and Idi Amin. Additionally, I discuss the important role rebel armies such as Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) and Joseph Kony's LRA. These are vital factors to understanding the current situation in Northern Uganda. Lastly, I discuss the initiatives that have been taken towards peace and the negative affects the war has had on Northern Uganda.

Chapter two focuses on the conditions under which children enter into the LRA, the roles children acquire once in captivity, and the ways children choose try to avoid abduction by the LRA. Furthermore, I discuss how they manage to escape life in captivity, and I provide an overview as to what life is like in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps once they return home.

The third and final chapter focuses on the rehabilitation and reintegration processes, examining techniques and approaches of the programs in Northern Uganda. I discuss the role of the reception centers, acting as the transition location for thousands of children from the bush to IDP camps or villages. The reception centers offer a variety of services to returning child soldiers such as basic health care, counseling, games, spiritual sessions, traditional dance and drama lessons, and family tracing.

Chapter 1:History of the War in Northern Uganda

For twenty-two years, from 1986 to 2008, researchers, observers, government and nongovernmental organizations alike have been observing the conflict in Northern Uganda, questioning the motives and tactics behind the war. What began as a conflict many years ago between several armies transgressed into a battle, seemingly without a cause. The Acholi people of Northern Uganda have endured a great amount of suffering from this long-standing war, and now a mere two years after peace talks have successfully begun to take place, the fighting has subsided and the Acholi people are striving to get their lives back.

To fully understand the conflict that has evolved in Northern Uganda, involving mainly Gulu, Kitgum, Lira, and Pader districts, it is helpful to briefly examine the twenty-four years after Uganda's independence in 1962, leading up to the war. This chapter will therefore examine the root causes of the war Uganda has been living for the past 22 years. This includes a historical recollection that provides a clear understanding of what life was like for the Acholi people since 1962.

Transition from British Rule to Independence

Since British colonialism, the people of Uganda have faced the harsh realities of violent conflicts as armies, both government-run and rebel armies, have risen and fallen.

The instability in their lives for many years was continuous. This can be noted by the rise of new armies and armed groups every several years beginning with the independence in 1962 and ending with Yoweri Museveni becoming president in 1986. Depending on the ruling party's ethnicity, opposing regions struggled to survive due to lack of support from the president's party or because of attacks by the national army. Not only did Ugandans lack security from their government, but they were also struggling to avoid conflict with rebel armies targeting civilians.

Despite the shift in leadership in 1962, the British left behind their mark on the Ugandan people. The Northern and Southern regions of Uganda lived in vastly different worlds in spite of their proximity. During the British rule, they pitted southerners against northerners to maintain control (Resolve Uganda, 2007). Additionally, the British introduced wide scale production and cash cropping solely to the Southern region and provided little economic help for the Northern region. As a result, the people of the North provided cheap labor to the developing regions in the South. The Southern and Eastern regions produced cotton, plantation rubber, cocoa, and coffee, bringing in a great deal of revenue. The Northern and Western regions failed to create opportunities for their own success and continued to provide inexpensive work to their rival regions (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999).

Milton Obote's First Term

During Milton Obote's term as Prime Minister from 1962 to 1971, the Constitution was ratified and resulted in the creation of two new positions: a President

and a Vice President (Resolve Uganda, 2007). Obote, Lango by ethnicity, from Apac district in Northern Uganda, was named the new President in 1963. In 1965, Obote was forced to recognize the autonomy of the traditional kingdoms including Buganda, near Kampala, the capital of Uganda, when he was faced with his lack of control over the regions. With force and by persuading independent parties to support the UPC, Obote eventually gained control over all of Uganda. It was during 1965 that Obote convinced several opposing members of parliament to cross the floor and support him. Once he had received their support, he reversed his support for Buganda, leaving his new supporters feeling manipulated. A joining of civilian forces grew strong when Obote's actions angered supporting and opposing parties. Opposition at the forefront did not stop Obote from taking the reins. Instead, Obote built a base in the army grounds, creating a safe haven, preventing removal from office by force. However, the severe protection did not stop groups from trying to overthrow Obote. At the end of 1965, a group of southern ministers in Buganda organized an unsuccessful attempt to remove Obote from office (Brett, 1995).

In 1966, Idi Amin, from Southern Uganda, was appointed as Obote's army commander of the UPC, after the removal of the former commander and the arrest of five ministers for supposedly smuggling stolen ivory and gold from former Zaire into Uganda (Brett, 1995). Throughout 1966 and 1967, Obote removed many educated Southern officers from their standings and proceeded to recruit and promote officers, using ethnicity as a primary factor in his decisions. The internal conflict between Obote and Amin caused by choosing officers of Obote's tribe from the central northern region and

not of Amin's from the north western region revealed an unstable army. This forced Obote to find additional political support and to decrease dependence on Amin, hoping to eventually remove him from Obote's forces. In 1967, Obote put the army at the center of the political rule. The following year, 1968, Obote attempted to create major changes within Uganda including a move that would leave Uganda as a single party state, essentially ensuring that candidates in one part of the country would receive more votes. He also tried to create a monopoly over all imports and exports and made an effort towards the implementation of constricting rules over the foreign parties. In 1970, three years after the hostility between Obote and Amin began, it was apparent that one leader would have to depart, so while Obote was at the Commonwealth Conference in Singapore, Amin took power from Obote (Brett, 1995).

Idi Amin's Presidential Term

When Amin initially gained power in 1971, he greatly benefited from Obote's vast unpopularity. However, when the economic state of Uganda began to crumble and his tactics appeared irrational, he faced his fate and was removed from office. In order to gain support at the foundational stages, Amin "released political prisoners, brought the [former King of Buganda's body back to the region for a proper] burial, reversed Obote's partial nationalisations [sic], and appointed a Council of Ministers from high-ranking politicians and public servants" (Brett, 1995). As the commander of the Army, Amin led a nine-year reign of horror and bloodshed until the National Liberation Army (UNLA) forced Amin to flee from Uganda (Brett, 1995).

Obote's Second Term

After ten years of Amin in control of Uganda, the national elections held in December of 1980 allowed Obote to return as president. Obote's second election was believed by many to have been corrupt, resulting in him unfairly returning to power. Shortly after Obote regained presidency in 1981, "[Yoweri] Museveni formed the National Resistance Army (NRA) and led 26 men into the bush to lead a guerilla war against Obote's UNLA" (Dodge, 1991). The area the NRA invaded, called the Luwero Triangle, is a densely populated, fertile area with approximately 750,000 Buganda tribespeople. In retaliation, in 1983, the UNLA responded to the NRA's onslaught with a massive counter-insurgency that lasted two years and left an estimated 200,000 dead and forced approximately 150,000 others into camps the UNLA had set up and monitored, and left another 150,000 displaced (Dodge, 1991). As a result of the "counter-insurgency," many children were orphaned and left to care for themselves. Initially, the NRA took in abandoned children and cared for them, which eventually evolved into a strategy the NRA used to gain forces for their army. The NRA saw the advantages to their situation because abandoned children did not have anyone responsible for them and would fight for them if they disagreed with their strategy. Additionally, the NRA was supplying the children with the basic necessities and initially provided schooling, therefore children were being taken care of and the NRA had uprising fighters and could use the children as soldiers if it was necessary. Eventually the standard became training children in self-defense and having them accompany soldiers around like personal

assistants, which would train them in actual combat. By 1985, the NRA was visibly using children as soldiers on the frontline (Brett, 1991).

In July of 1985, it had become blatantly obvious that the Obote regime was incapable of efficiently running Uganda and maintaining peace among the people and the various armies that had formed over the years. The support network that was upholding Obote and his forces fell apart and fighting broke out between Acholi and Langli soldiers. The Acholi soldiers who had been stationed in the capital, Kampala, retreated to Northern Uganda. After launching a bloody coup on Kampala and gaining control, the Acholi people named Tito Okello, as president, a senior Acholi army officer in the UNLA. Quickly after gaining power, the UNLA invited all fighting groups to join forces. The NRA refused, but many of the existing armed forces from Amin's regime conformed. During his six months in office, Okello entered negotiations with the rebel NRA army, led by Yoweri Museveni. From the negotiations, the Nairobi Peace Agreement was formulated. The Peace Agreement called for many things including a ceasefire for all armies in Uganda, all roads to be opened and safe for civilian travel, and soldiers were not to engage in criminal acts or anything violating a person's human rights. Furthermore, a national army that would represent the country, as a whole, was to be formed, all arms from combatant forces were to be collected and stored by the government, and Kampala was to be demilitarized and neutralized by removing all troops. Also, the people who served in Amin's regime were to be punished according to the law for any atrocities or other heinous acts they committed, and Uganda was to hold fair elections without the manipulation that had plagued the country in the past

(Conciliation Resources, 1985). The people of Uganda failed to see the effects of the Nairobi Peace Agreement and the chaos and killing continued as it was prior to the Peace Agreements. In spite of the Nairobi Peace Agreement, the NRA expanded their sphere of control from the central regions of Uganda to the Southern and Southeast regions. In October 1985, with the use of child soldiers clearly a standard; the UNICEF opened a dialogue with the NRA leadership regarding the issue of child soldiers (Brett, 1995).

Yoweri Museveni Gains Control

On January 29, 1986, Museveni and the NRA toppled Okello and his army. Museveni claimed the presidency and formed his own army called the United People's Democratic Movement (UPDM) (Allen, 1991). A mere month after gaining the presidency, Museveni declared all child soldiers were to be removed from the frontlines after seeing the obvious visibility of child soldiers in the NRA (Dodge, 1991). Museveni and the UPDM defeated the remainder of the UNLA forces. Under Museveni's control the Acholi lacked any political and militaristic control for the first time. During the Amin and Obote regimes, the Acholi could fight back but after the defeat by Museveni, their inability to form an effective army was apparent (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999). Remaining UNLA forces, many Acholi, and Amin and Obote supporters joined forces to form the Uganda People's Defense Army (UPDA) in Juba, Sudan. Juba, approximately 100 miles from Uganda's northern border, made access to Uganda relatively easy but gave them the power to abide by Sudanese laws rather than Ugandan laws. Despite

government orders to end the use of child soldiers, an estimated 3,000 were said to still be a part of NRA combat in May of 1986 (Resolve Uganda, 2007).

After the Nairobi Peace Agreement had been signed, the North felt marginalized and was mobilized for war, helping to initiate what is noted as the official beginning of the war in Uganda. Many people and groups in Uganda shared a desire to remove the NRA and National Resistance Movement (NRM) from power. The NRM is described as the political wing of the NRA (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999). In an attempt to remove the NRA and NRM from power, Acholi soldiers spread negative propaganda using Radio Uganda so they could create panic among the people. To further their efforts, the Acholi began a campaign with a goal in mind of convincing the Acholi people that they needed an army and this group would be capable of defending their rights as Acholis. Their effort did not amount to anything great.

On August 22, 1986, the once very effective NRA was attacked by the UPDA. With the collaboration of the Federal Democratic Movement of Uganda (FEDEMU) and the NRA, many Acholis voluntarily joined the UPDA for protection. The Acholis feared that if they did not join the army, they would be the targets of destruction. For many, the fear of the FEDEMU and NRA individually or collaboratively, came from the knowledge that they were openly and widely looting villages, performing torture, executions, and rapes (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999).

Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirit Movement

The history of Alice Auma Lakwena is essential to understanding the successors to Lakwena. Lakwena was born in 1958 in Bugnatira, a village, often referred to as a cult, which centers their belief system around a sacred rock with mysterious footprints on it. After several years in a marriage, Lakwena was unable to produce children, and was cast aside by her husband, believing that she was a “loose woman.” Her father, Severino, got healers who were unable to “fix” Lakwena (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999). Much of Lakwena’s mysteriousness began when she disappeared in the Nile for 40 days in May 1985. Upon her return, she proclaimed she had gained the power of a healer. Widespread international coverage described Lakwena as a prophetess, a witch, a commander, and a millennial leader. Alice Auma received her more commonly known name, Lakwena, because it is believed that the Holy Spirit of Lakwena, an Italian officer who died in World War I, took control of Auma’s body on May 25, 1985 (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999).

Towards the end of 1986, Alice Auma (more commonly referred to as Alice Lakwena) gained a significant role in Uganda. From August 1986 to November 1987, Lakwena and the army she formed, the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM), created a rebellion against Museveni’s UPDA. In September 1986, living in Kitgum district in Northern Uganda, Lakwena and her followers were given guns. A former UNLA commander was responsible for supplying the army with weapons and ammunition (Allen, 1991). A well-known first experience for many occurred in October when a group of about twenty men marched into Gulu, a town in Gulu district, singing hymns, led by a man waving a Bible.

The lead man was shot and killed (Allen, 1991). For many, this was the first they would hear of Alice Lakwena, but it would most definitely not be the last.

In November of 1986, soldiers from the UPDA joined Lakwena's forces and won a battle near Kilak Corner in Northern Uganda, near the Kitgum and Gulu Districts. This victory helped Lakwena's HSM gain significant support from civilians and other soldiers who previously may have doubted her abilities (Allen, 1991). Lakwena desperately needed support as her resources had quickly diminished and the HSM was in great need of soldiers and ammunition. Despite Museveni's offer of amnesty if any rebels from the HSM army ceased fighting, the HSM gained tremendous support from civilians and other armies. Many wondered if the following was so strong because of the strong desire to have something new and supportive in their lives.

After years of turmoil and conflict between armies rising and falling and the government exchanging hands frequently the people were searching for hope and spiritual redemption and it looked as though Lakwena and the HSM could provide what they craved. In the Acholi world, spirituality and a common belief system were institutionalized, with a priest who served not only as a public figure but also provided personal services to clients. The Acholis believed an evil spirit created every disaster and spirits were a part of every aspect of life. During the mid 1980s, missionaries played a large role in the extreme conversions to Christianity. As the role of faith had played such a vital role in the lives of people in Acholiland, in addition to the constant violence and fighting, the Acholis were feeling the effects and were searching for someone to provide them with a sense of hope. Lakwena believed total destruction was near and the military

powers had to be defeated. Proclaiming she was a healer and could provide the very things the Acholis were craving, many Acholi people supported Lakwena and the HSM (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999).

The moral code of the HSM was strict and included three points: the confirmation of Lakwena's leadership, a strengthened solidarity of its group, and the inclusion of a Biblical scripture to introduce Christian power (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999). The confirmation of her leadership meant that they were to execute orders only from Lakwena. No one else had the ability to give orders. To strengthen solidarity of its group meant that they were to eat food only with those who had also been sworn in by the Holy Spirit. The last point regarding the Biblical references to introduce Christian power meant simply that they should love one another as they would love themselves.

Requirements into the HSM were as follows: people were to have two testicles (no more and no less), they were sprinkled with holy water and covered with a shea butter oil that would provide them with the power of invulnerability, and they were to undergo training to change stones into exploding grenades and bees and snakes into immunized allies (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999).

The HSM received mass support after the Acholi realized the lack of support they would get from Museveni. Unfortunately, the Acholi supported a movement that would last a mere one year and eight months and provided little, if any, support for them. In November 1987, after the downfall of Lakwena's army, she escaped to Kenya where she lived in a refugee camp and the Acholis returned to their homes in Northern Uganda (Resolve Uganda, 2007). Lakwena spent a short period of time in the refugee camp

before pleading with the Ugandan government to grant her protection and to allow her to return to her country. The Minister of State for Political Affairs, Amama Mbabazi agreed to allow her back into Uganda but would not provide immunity for any legal action that would be taken because of previous crimes she committed or directed her army to carry out. Displeased with Mbabazi's response, Lakwena "threaten[ed] to resume war on the grounds that tools of Satan can never destroy the kingdom of almighty father" (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999).

In 1987, the NRA had officially set aside the Nairobi Peace Agreement, issuing calls over Radio Uganda for all former UNLA soldiers to return to headquarters. This resulted in the UNLA and Acholis fleeing north into Sudan in order to secure safety. Even though the Nairobi Peace Agreements were very infrequently regulated, the people were aware of the implications of the official dismissal of the agreement and fled the country (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999).

In June of 1988, the Gulu Peace Accord resulted from peace talks between the NRA and UPDA. This accounted for more than two thousand UPDA soldiers who were incorporated into the national military (Resolve Uganda, 2007). "The peace agreement gives amnesty to the combatants and begins a discussion of a new constitution and a northern reconstruction program" (Uganda Conflict Action Network, 2006). The Gulu Peace Accord meant it was the end of the UPDA's armed struggle and they joined forces with the NRA. Fortunately, following the ending of the UPDA's rebellion, Museveni's coup also ended peacefully (Resolve Uganda, 2007). Joseph Kony, an important player

in the history of the war in Uganda, refused to recognize the Gulu Peace Accord and began his own army called the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army

Joseph Kony was born in 1961 in Odek, an area southeast of Gulu. He is the cousin of Lakwena and because of his connection to Lakwena's family, people had some insight into what was to come. Kony dropped out of school and formed his own gang in Gulu when people did not see him as a prophet as they did Lakwena. The gang committed petty crimes and covered themselves in banana leaves. Kony desired the respect and support Lakwena had; however, she did not endorse him because she did not have full confidence in him. Rather, to prove his abilities, Lakwena invited Kony and his army to join her in an attempt to take over Gulu, but they failed. Lakwena imprisoned Kony, believing he was possessed by evil spirits and was a danger to others (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999). Furthermore, Lakwena wrote letters accusing Kony of working with Museveni. Kony joined the UPDA's black battalion where he was given control of forces at the end of 1987. With the fall of the UPDA, Kony began his own movement, which he initially called the HSM 2. HSM 2 was renamed the Salvation Army, then the United Democratic Christian Force, and finally the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). People from both the UPDA and HSM armies joined forces and became members of the LRA (Resolve Uganda, 2007).

Kony has been characterized by many as a charismatic leader, a quality that would enable him to gain wide support from officers and little resistance from the

population. Many have said Kony is gifted with a rhetorical and dramatic gift, captivating their attention. His behavior confused many people because he has a mesmerizing voice, long braids, and occasionally appeared in women's clothing. For many, it was unclear whether he dressed in women's clothing out of mockery or for some other reason. Kony gained many devoted followers including the Sudanese government who allowed Kony to train the LRA's child soldiers.

The LRA worked in opposition to the Ugandan government. In addition to his magnetic personality, Kony created a doctrine based on Christian ideology and Ugandan traditional religion. The Ten Commandments are referenced frequently, as though they are the backbone of the LRA's manifesto. For the past twenty-two years, Kony and the LRA have increased their level of violence and heinous crimes they commit against civilians and their enemies. If children tried to escape from the LRA, the newly abducted child soldiers were required to torture and kill the children who attempted an escape. Rules of killing are enforced and include things such as a person riding a bicycle would have his or her feet cut off because that person had the ability to quickly reach other people and inform them of something they learned. Lips were often cut off so the person is unable to tell information they know. Ears were removed so they cannot hear secrets. Civilians who disagree with the LRA were brutally punished (Soldier Child, 2002). "The LRA has combined an apocalyptic spiritualism with opportunistic politics and warlordism" (Resolve Uganda, 2007). Throughout the late 1980s and well into 2004, the LRA received support and safety from the Sudanese government in exchange for fighting the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) (Resolve Uganda, 2007).

Peace Talks

In July of 1988, a second and very important peace accord was reached in Uganda. The Addis Ababa Accord between the Ugandan government and the United People's Democratic Movement [UPDM (the political movement behind the UPDA)] was an amnesty offer that would allow UPDA forces to join the national military (Resolve Uganda, 2007). The Addis Ababa Accord and the Gulu Peace Accord are important factors when analyzing the actions taken by the Ugandan government to claim peace.

During 1992 and 1993, the peace talks appeared to have worked, as the fighting and the violence appeared to have significantly lessened. Betty Bigombe, the Minister for the Pacification of the North led peace negotiations between the LRA and the Ugandan government in 1993, strived to end the conflicts and stop the atrocities that had been occurring around them. It is reported that the talks were within hours of completion when President Museveni issued a seven-day ultimatum for the rebels to surrender or the Ugandan government would take action against them (Resolve Uganda, 2007). The ground they had gained seemed to crumble before their eyes as the LRA retreated and lost trust in the government, feeling rushed and misguided. Kony denounced the efforts towards peace, saying the elders had committed high treason and were not to be trusted. Museveni received word that the government of Sudan was planning an intervention and a delay in the peace process would provide them with adequate time to restart the conflict (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999). In addition to providing financial support, the government of Sudan equipped the LRA with new landmines and a location for training.

With support from Sudan, the LRA was capable of continuing to carry out their mission and engage in attacks. The support of the Ugandan government was not what they needed, but rather the Ugandan government was in dire need of them to end the fighting.

LRA Attacks on Northern Uganda

Continuing their mission, the LRA launched several massacres in Northern Ugandan communities, killing almost 1,000 people. The first of the attacks occurred in 1995 in Atiak, killing between 170-220 people. In 1996, they forged two more deadly attacks on the Karuma village, killing 50 and the Acholi refugee camp, killing 100 people. The deadliest attack held in 1997, was the Lokung-Parbek attack where more than 400 people were left dead. The LRA used tactics such as hacking and cubing people to death, leaving their remainders for anyone who stumbles upon the scene to find their mangled bodies (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999).

With each attack by the LRA, the level of confidence in Museveni diminished as they believed that he could not protect his people and end the war that had waged on for more than two decades became common belief. To further their lack of confidence in Museveni, an LRA ambush led to the abduction of 245 schoolgirls at St. Mary's College, near Lira, and gained attention of people around the world. The LRA went to the school during the early hours of the morning and abducted all 245 girls, tying them together so none could escape and used the girls as sexual slaves, domestic servants, soldiers, and wives. The girls were taken to Southern Sudan where escape is extremely difficult due to the isolated location, ensuring they are easily found by the LRA and the SPLA. The

widespread attention to this case raised many questions as to why Museveni was not doing more for the Ugandans to provide them protection from rebel armies such as the LRA (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999).

In attempt to provide security for the Ugandan people, the government created “protected villages” in 1996, which was an attempt to isolate LRA fighters and create a safe haven for civilians. What seemed like an ideal plan became a displacement nightmare, making people living within the boundaries of the “protected villages” easy targets for the LRA, and failed to provide safety for the civilians. To further their efforts to reach peace, the Ugandan and Sudanese governments signed agreements that they would release all people captured during times of conflict. (Doom Ruddy and Koen Vlassenroot, 1999.)

1997 appeared to have been a successful year in the striving for peace. Kacoke Madi, an organization advocating for the peaceful resolution to war, comprised of Acholi Diaspora in Europe and North America, held a conference where they outlined a program where the LRA would be able to articulate their agenda and explain their motives. Also in 1997, the Acholi Religious Leaders and Peace Initiative (ARLPI) comprised of traditional and religious leaders, joined forces to bring peace to Uganda. The ARLPI has continued to meet since their beginning, eleven years ago. Sant’ Egidio, a Catholic group from Rome offered to mediate negotiations, serving as an outside source that could act objectively, in light of the trouble they were experiencing with the peace talks. Unfortunately both ARLPI and Sant’ Egidio failed to bring peace to Uganda because the LRA’s goals remained unclear to the peace initiators (Resolve Uganda, 2007). As the

motives of the LRA were incomprehensible over the years, the LRA gained the term “rebel army.” and Kony, himself, has used the term “rebel” to define his movement. (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999).

The Acholi have experienced the highest degree of violence since 1986 and have been targeted for many of the heinous acts committed against civilians in Northern Uganda. Politicians in Uganda have labeled the conflict as “Northern based,” affecting mainly the Acholi, and having little influence on the rest of the country (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999). The question has been raised, “How can the president support the SPLA, RPF, Kabila, and still pretend he is lacking the means to support the Acholis from the LRA, a first step toward peace?” (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999). For the twenty years Kony has been in control of the LRA, Museveni has been encouraged from both local and international officials to begin peace talks and reach a conclusion that would bring civility, stability, and peace to Uganda. When the LRA announced they built an office in London, Museveni was forced to take action, so he had a road built along the Sudan border that would allow for rapid military movement and reinforcements when needed, unsure of what resources would spawn from the LRA’s expansion. (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999).

The LRA Loses Support

In 1999, funding for the LRA from the Sudanese government was cut; however, their primary bases remained in Southern Sudan for years to follow (Dodge, 1991). After years of attempts to calm the violence, the Amnesty Act of 2000 is said to be one of the

most important initiatives, as it offered amnesty to LRA fighters who surrendered and ended their violent acts. Since the Amnesty Act was in 2000, more than 8,000 members of the LRA have agreed and turned themselves in to the Amnesty Commission. Several problems have presented themselves as reported from Resolve Uganda: “First, only about half of the amnesty packages have been distributed. Second, many former LRA fighters remain discontented because they return to squalid displacement camps and lack basic resources. Some have even expressed their desire to return to the rebel army because camp conditions are so poor” (Resolve Uganda, 2007). The fear that soldiers would return to the LRA because of unsatisfactory living conditions merely encourages the rebels to remain in the army rather than turn themselves in at all.

Launching another attempt to create peace in Uganda, the government began Operation Iron Fist in 2002, pushing the rebels south Sudan into the Northern regions of Uganda. This program, in addition to the Amnesty Act of 2000 that failed former LRA fighters, and other ceasefire attempts perpetuated a system of mistrust between the government and LRA, creating a tainted vision for future negotiations (Resolve Uganda, 2007). The LRA soldiers were informed that they would be treated one way and receive certain benefits, but when the time came to receive their side of the deal, the government failed to follow through. LRA leaders became more hesitant in trusting the Ugandan government after they had seen the reliability of their offers.

Effects of the War on Northern Uganda

Continuing with much-needed efforts, in August 2002, President Museveni declared a unilateral one-week ceasefire, inviting the LRA to engage in peace talks. They refused the offer, but expressed a willingness to work out a solution the following December. This was a sign of hope among the brutal attacks for both the government and the citizens of Uganda, knowing that the LRA would agree to engage in peace negotiations gave them a dream that one day Uganda would see peace. The possibility of successful peace talks set the stage for a face-to-face meeting proposed by the Ugandan government in March 2003. Unfortunately, the meeting did not occur due to activity in the “peace contact area” by the United People’s Defense Force (UPDF).

By 2004, the conflicts in Uganda had made their mark on the country. 1.7 million people, who accounted for more than 80% of the region, were displaced in wretched IDP camps, lacking access to basic resources such as food and security. “Starvation, poor sanitation, psychological trauma, lack of education, HIV/AIDS and prostitution persist” (Resolve Uganda, 2007) on an unfathomable level within the IDP camps. The country was faced with extreme turmoil, in great need of assistance, when Museveni expressed willingness and the necessity to negotiate with the LRA. After years of striving to reach a peaceful accord, in May 2004, the LRA agreed to begin negotiations for peace and by the end of 2004 a ceasefire transpired. Bigombe, who initially began peace talks with the LRA in 1994, returned as a chief peace mediator and established communication between the Ugandan government and the LRA. Both sides felt hesitant in trusting the other one based on their previous experiences during the negotiations and outside of their

professional exchanges. The suspicion the two groups had going in (in conjunction with the lack of international leverage, assisting in the negotiation and mediation process) acting as objective parties, made it nearly impossible to reach a positive outcome. As a result, the 2004 peace initiatives were spoiled.

In the three years from 2002-2005, over 25,000 children were abducted from their lives at school, home, and anywhere in between, to join the LRA ranks as child soldiers. Some sources have reports figures upward of 66,000 children abducted by the LRA since their beginning in 1987. A series of peace talks took place in July 2005, sponsored by the government of Sudan and on August 1, where Kony called a truce, and placing hope into a country that had been living a state of constant war for almost two decades. Later in the month, on August 26th, the government and LRA agreed on a ceasefire, an action that had been attempted for years. The ceasefire stated that the LRA forces were to gather in two areas in Southern Sudan. About a month after the ceasefire had been agreed to, the LRA gathered their forces at the designated areas, but quickly dispersed, in fear that an attack by the UPDF would transpire. Organizing their troops in set areas where other people would know their exact location frightened the LRA rebels, thinking they had been manipulated and would be harshly punished if they stayed in their zones. The following month, in September, Museveni asked the International Criminal Court (ICC) “to maintain the charges against the LRA until a comprehensive peace agreement was reached, but said that once this was agreed the government would intervene to keep the commanders ‘safe’ from the ICC” (Amnesty International, 2007). This caused the peace talks to come to a stand still. The LRA had failed to assemble their forces in the

designated areas and the UPDF resumed their attacks on the LRA (Amnesty International, 2007). Despite transgressions on the ceasefire, in November both the government and the LRA agreed to prolong the process and continue the talks. A deadline of December 31, 2005 was set to clear all camps and have people return to their homes.

It is estimated that more than 300,000 people left the camps by October (Amnesty International, 2007). Upon return to communities that had experienced social and economical upheaval, the children who had been used as soldiers were often reluctant to return to their homes. There was a wide mistrust among community members because they feared an LRA attack would spawn and were unsure of what atrocities the children were capable of committing. Members of the LRA had raped most of the girl child soldiers, and as a result, many bore children known as “bush babies.” Both the status of a rape victim and the young mothers without father figures to help raise the children often ended in socially ostracizing the girls and young women.

Returning home was not an option for many of the child soldiers because many could not face their families after the cruel acts they had taken against their loved ones and because of the community’s reaction to children who had served as child soldiers. Instead of returning home, some of the returnees went to IDP camps, where most of their families already resided. The conditions in the camps were so atrocious that some of the children actually returned to the LRA, knowing that life could not be worse than it was in the camps. A “2005 UNICEF study found that at least 60% of women in the largest camp had encountered some form of sexual and domestic violence. The report identified

‘alcohol abuse, idleness, poverty and cultural practices such as wife inheritance’ as factors causing this violence. Some young girls have been forced into prostitution because of the dire camp conditions. In addition, soldiers in the UPDF, tasked with protecting northerners, were accused of raping young women in the camps” (Resolve Uganda, 2007).

In 2005, in his endeavor to reach a peace deal, President Museveni offered to grant amnesty to the top five LRA leaders, including Joseph Kony. The ICC issued warrants against Kony and other LRA leaders earlier in the year, meaning Museveni’s offer violated international human rights laws (Amnesty International, 2007).

Participating in peace talks and agreeing to a ceasefire, the LRA leadership moved their longtime location from Southern Sudan to Garamba Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Reports of attacks by the LRA were low, however it caused some displacement in the area due to fears of what the LRA might inflict upon civilians. By the end of 2005, Northern Uganda and Southern Sudan began meetings to discuss Sudan’s potential to mediate peace talks between the Ugandan government and the LRA. These efforts are what led to the Juba peace talks that continue to be negotiated in 2008 (Resolve Uganda, 2007).

By July 2006, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) announced that more than 10,000 refugees had returned home to Uganda (Amnesty International, 2007). In July 2006, the Juba peace talks officially began in Juba, Sudan, utilizing the Sudanese government as mediators. The peace talks steadily progressed until January 2007 when the LRA refused to return to Juba, demanding a new mediator

and location. Fortunately, the new UN special envoy and former Mozambican president Joaquim Chissano persuaded the LRA to return and continue the dialogue. As a part of the Juba peace negotiations, five countries including Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, Mozambique, and the DRC agreed to send high-level observers in order to assist in the mediation process. Furthermore, the African Union (AU) coordinated eight new ceasefire monitors to help ensure the agreements would be upheld, as they had not been in the past. After many offerings and compromises, the peace talks resumed on April 26, 2007 in Juba. During peace talks, the Ugandan government agreed to ask the ICC to revoke arrest warrants for the top LRA leaders once a final agreement has been reached.

Summary

The current day conflict in Northern Uganda can be traced back to the 1980's when Yoweri Museveni, Uganda's current day president, gained control in 1981. It is embedded within a larger regional crisis involving the DRC, Northern Sudan, and several different communities within Uganda. To the west of Uganda, the leaders of the LRA have taken ownership of land in the DRC, threatening to unravel a second wave of a conflict between Uganda, Rwanda, and the DRC's governments that took place in the early 1990's. To the north, Sudan and their instability from their intra-country conflicts offer little confidence that conflict will not arise, spreading into Uganda. The LRA has spread throughout parts of the DRC and Southern Sudan, expanding the conflict to include neighboring countries. Additionally, Northern Uganda has tensions within that create unrest and uprisings within their own region. Within Uganda, the Karamojong

cattle raiders from the east of Uganda “suffer from insecurity and severe crackdown of the Ugandan government,” (Resolve Uganda, 2007) forcing several thousand Acholis from Northern Uganda to be displaced.

Chapter 2: Living in a World of War

When children go to war they experience situations differently than adults. Children are in their maturation process and lack life experience that would provide them with the understanding about complex issues of animosities and conflicts. Furthermore, they are susceptible to ideological conditioning, enhancing the likelihood of brainwashing (Honwana, 2006). Children and young adults are at the beginning stages of or have not yet formulated their own belief systems or personal values, which allows older individuals to manipulate their young minds and sculpt them to be the soldiers they need and want in their army. This chapter describes the ways in which children become members of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and transform from children to active agents in the war, tasks they take on while in captivity, the ways they work to avoid abduction, and how they manage to leave the LRA. Additionally, this chapter briefly describes what life is like for many after leaving captivity and living in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps.

The images shown in the media of child soldiers are often those of young boys holding AK-47s that are larger than the children. Seldom are pictures of young girls shown as soldiers or as wives of soldiers, acquiring the role of a soldier to their assigned husbands. For the purpose of this project, a "child soldier is any child – boy or girl – under the age of 18, who is compulsorily, forcibly or voluntarily recruited or used in

hostility by armed forces, paramilitaries, civil defence [sic] units or other armed groups” (Machel, 2001). This definition is an important point because in this paper I analyze the various roles of child soldiers, and the reader should not assume that only boys have served as fighters in the LRA.

Joining LRA Rebel Forces

To date, UNICEF has shown figures climbing upwards of 25,000 child soldiers participating in the war since its official beginning in 1986 (2008). For children who are not counted in the figure of 25,000, the commuting centers may have served their purpose, but others are less fortunate. Children may join LRA rebel forces in three main ways. The first, most common, is not the choice of the children or their families. The children are abducted and harshly and forcibly torn from their lives by the LRA rebels. The second is when families encourage or coerce their children into joining the rebel army. This happens for a variety of reasons including economic, security, or other benefits provided by the LRA. The third way children join the LRA is voluntarily. This includes a small percentage of children who believe in the mission of the LRA, or fear safety of their family and, thus, choose to surrender to the LRA rather than put their family’s lives in danger (Hick, 2001). Some children believe having a gun of their own will provide them with protection and thus choose to join rebel forces (Machel, 2001). Although Machel’s comments do not refer to Uganda’s child soldiers, the concept of some children experiencing power by having a gun applies equally to the conflict in Northern Uganda.

The most common way children join the LRA forces occurs when they are abducted from their homes, schools, or somewhere in between. As Boyden points out, since 1994, almost 80 percent of fighters have been abducted (2004). They are forcefully taken, often made to watch their family members endure brutal beatings or killings. This serves a dual purpose, showing by example what consequences they will face if they attempt to escape or disobey orders. The second purpose of the instant and brutal killings is to desensitize them to the fear of inflicting pain upon others and to indoctrinate them to the ways of the LRA. Alanyo Betty, a former child soldier, explains how she saw her two brothers killed during her first week in the LRA, “They came to our house at midnight. They took my two brothers, my one sister, and I (sic). We walked for one week to Sudan. My brothers were killed on the way because they could not carry a heavy load. I saw them get killed by pangas” (Personal Interview, 4/2/08).

LRA Benefits of Abducting Children

The LRA benefits from abducting children for several reasons. First, many of the family members do not know what happened to their children, so the families assume their children voluntarily joined the LRA and would then reject their children if they attempted to return (Andrew, Personal interview, 4/3/08). The LRA can tell the families whatever they please about the children they abducted children. Frequently families are lied to and told that their children have been killed and will never be returning. If their children then try to return sometime later, their families often refuse to believe the children are who they say they are because the families have been told the children were

killed. Another strategy of the LRA, is that they might choose to abduct only one or two of the children and leave the rest, threatening that if the abducted children try to escape, the LRA will return and kill the remaining children or family members (Rose, Personal Interview, 4/3/08). During abduction, the child may be forced to kill his or her own family members or neighbors. Doing so creates a sense of distrust, trauma, and stigmatization of the community members, making it difficult for the children to return without adequate rehabilitation. Furthermore, the LRA benefits greatly from abducting children because they can choose which soldiers and wives they prefer to have in their ranks and which ones to use as examples to indoctrinate the other children (Boyden, 2004).

Families Coerce Children to Join Rebels

The second way children become rebels in the LRA is through encouragement or coercion by family members. This accounts for a small portion of the child soldiers in the LRA. With resources scarce in Northern Uganda, receiving assurance that the LRA would not attack or destroy them, families occasionally sell or trade their children in exchange for money or security for their family or land. Machel explains that children benefit from coming from families of wealth or higher levels of education because their families have the ability to buy their safety or freedom through legal or political means (2001). Parents, who experienced other hardships such as HIV/AIDS or a lack of ability to send their children to school, may choose to give their children to the LRA, knowing that they would be provided for in ways they could not otherwise. What they may or may

not have known at the time is the pain and killing their children would endure as members of the LRA. A smaller percentage of families support the mission of the LRA, believing they have the ability to overthrow Uganda's Government. Therefore, they volunteer or encourage their children to volunteer to join the LRA forces.

Voluntarily Joining LRA Rebel Forces

The third and least common way children become rebels in the LRA is through voluntary action of the children. Machel explains, "Children respond to a variety of pressures such as economic, cultural, social, and political factors, and 'voluntarily' join armies" (2004). Thousands of people have been killed during the 22 years of war, many of them parents, leaving orphans behind to fend for themselves. Living in the IDP camps has not given children faith that the conditions of life would improve, so they choose to dedicate their lives to the LRA and the missions they carry out. For some children, the idea of knowing that they could be taken from their homes in the middle of the night or during their math lesson at school or anywhere in between is enough for them to join and avoid the feeling of not knowing when their time might come. Others still, support the ways of the LRA, working with Kony to overthrow Museveni and the Ugandan government. Some children may choose to become active agents in the battle they believed in. In 2002, the LRA issued a statement to the sub-county chief, local commissioner, and IDP population stating, "Don't stay in the camp. Museveni has put you in the camps to finish you and take over the land in Acholi. We will kill everybody in the camp" (Human Rights Watch, 2003). Knowing their future was grim either way, a

small number of children chose to join the LRA, rather than waiting for death in the IDP camp. This group of child soldiers is by far the minority; however, it is important to discuss their role as it puts a different perspective that child soldiers are always the victims. It is possible for children to be both victims of violence and perpetrators of violence (Hick, 2001).

Roles of a Child Soldier

Once in the LRA, some of the many roles child soldiers serve are porters, civil servants, sexual servants, wives, messengers, combatants, and cooks. Children often hold more than one role (Singer, 2005). As Akello Rose says, “I was trained to be a fighter, but I was also a wife to a commander” (Personal Interview, 4/3/2008). Boys are primarily used as porters, civil servants, messengers, and combatants, but are also used as sexual servants and cooks when they disobey an order or when a commanding officer feels it is necessary to make a point using them as examples. Girls generally serve as wives, sexual servants, and cooks, often doubling as fighters. As a result of their frequent roles as wives or sexual slaves, the girls become impregnated at young ages, delivering babies born in captivity. Holding the title of a wife can arguably have its benefits. For example, wives often have to work fewer hours and receive better food. Once wives become pregnant, they no longer have to serve roles as porters or fighters (Singer, 2005). This is a common benefit for girl child soldiers who are wives of commanders in rebel armies. Lamwaka Florence explains, “In 2001, I became pregnant. I worked day and night in the garden and was never given enough food to eat. Since I was pregnant, I

stayed in Sudan while they left to Uganda for capturing, looting, and killing” (Personal interview, 4/3/08). Boys and girls alike undergo various forms of sexual violence, including rape and any sexual act committed with the use of coercion. Sexual violence is not limited to physical sexual acts, but also includes forced nude dancing for the entertainment of others. Young girls held in captivity in the LRA are particularly vulnerable because other LRA rebels may think they are less likely to carry sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS (Machel, 2004).

The process of becoming fighters in the LRA can be quite gruesome. The indoctrination begins with a long journey from their homes in Northern Uganda to Juba in Southern Sudan, which can take up to one week when traveling by foot. They are given luggage and other loads sometimes weighing as much as their own small bodies. If they cannot carry the loads the many miles to Juba, they are publicly reprimanded or killed in front of their siblings, relatives, and friends. On the way to Juba, the LRA attacks villages, killing and stealing. It is during the early stages where the LRA indoctrinates the children. Singer notes that the process of indoctrination is to instill a “quality worldview of a soldier.” He writes of the factors that make up the “sustaining motivation” that keep soldiers in the army despite the challenges and discomforts they encounter. This occurs during the initial stages of becoming a soldier. They are repeatedly told that the LRA is their new family. If they try to escape from their new families, they would be killed, if not by the LRA, then surely by the Ugandan government. The child soldiers then become dependent on the LRA to meet their needs and their strong desires to be a part of a community (2005). The children in the LRA find

themselves well provided for, having access to the goods they have looted from the villages. They see this as an encouraging factor to remain in the rebel forces. During their time in Northern Uganda with their families, food was often scarce, but life in the LRA proved to be a lifestyle many desired. They would be given endless access to food, shelter, drugs, and other plentiful goods if they volunteered to go to the frontlines as fighters. For this reason, many children choose to become frontline fighters rather than to work as porters or other jobs. Once in the LRA long enough to understand the ranking system and its corresponding power, the children begin to desire promotion and power. Promotions are granted to those who impress their commanders by raping or killing significant numbers of people (Moses, Personal Interview, 4/3/08).

Avoiding Abduction by the LRA

Many children go to great lengths to avoid abduction by the LRA. The LRA often strike homes during the late hours of the night, tearing children from their families and brutally injuring or killing family members in the process (Human Rights Watch, 2007). For children in Northern Uganda, knowing the LRA were nearby, it was a common practice for children to walk long distances each night to sleep at guarded centers. This operation is called “night commuting.” From 2003 until 2006, thousands of children left their homes in search of security, so they could sleep in buildings made into night commuting centers. At the peak of the night commuting activity, an estimated 40,000 children commuted nightly. Some children walked many miles each night from their villages to sleep in the protected hospitals, schools, NGO compounds, and any other

available building that had been turned commuting centers to sleep shoulder to shoulder with other children fearing the same fate (Resolve Uganda, 2007).

While the night commuting centers were effective in providing thousands of children refuge from their nightly terror, they added to Northern Uganda's problems in several other prominent ways. Children who made it safely to the commuting centers remained mostly protected from the LRA rebels. Other children never made it to the center and were abducted by the rebels during their journeys to the commuting centers. Okello Moses Rubomgangeyo tells of his brother who was abducted on his way to the center, saying, "I was lucky and went the other way. He was unfortunate and took a different path and never made it to the commuting center" (Personal interview, 4/3/08). A problem many saw as a result of the commuting centers was a rise of young girls becoming pregnant by young boy night commuters. The children at the centers arrived *en masse*, and supervision was extremely limited. Therefore, combined with the lack of health and sexual education and supervision, young girls and boys, commuting to the centers, were having babies of their own. As a result, many of the young girls were forced to care for the children and faced possible rejection from family and community members. In addition, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS rates among youth significantly increased (Moses, Personal Interview, 4/3/08).

Leaving the Bush

Children react to their new lifestyles in the LRA in different ways. Some try to escape immediately, lacking any desire to take part in the war, while others stay for years

in the LRA, gaining rank or giving birth to several children in the bush. Escaping from the LRA is a dangerous and terrifying experience some only dream about. Frightening techniques are common among the LRA, so many fear attempting to escape. Examples of escapees tied to trees and burned alive in front of young rebels are both unfortunate and common. Other children who have returned from the bush have told stories of being forced to carry around decomposing corpses of children who were killed while they were trying to escape (Singer, 2005). Escaping or being set free from the LRA is a fantasy for many regardless of the mode of entering the army. Much of their time was spent in Juba in Southern Sudan where their main base resided for several years. Water is scarce and resources are hard to come by from Juba to Northern Uganda and since most of the children are unfamiliar with the area, they are unable to develop an effective strategy to escape. There is little development near the base, making a quick get away to anything that was close to a dream they could only conjure. Aside from the natural dangers, escape from Juba is treacherous because they were likely to be found on their way to safety. Until 2004, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) supported the LRA, providing weapons and money. The SPLA was rampant in Southern Sudan, making escape from both of these armies, until 2005, nearly impossible. In early 2005, after peace agreements between the Ugandan Government and the LRA failed, the Sudanese Government signed a peace agreement with the SPLA stating that the LRA would not remain in Sudan (Country Watch, 2008). Today, if children escape while in Sudan, the SPLA assists in getting children to the UN or other identified centers (Florence, Personal Interview, 4/3/08).

Typically, children escape from the LRA rather than being set free; however, those who have been released do exist. Ex-child soldier, Lalam Everyline tells us, “The day I was abducted, they killed my uncle and some of my other relatives immediately. I was set free after 3 months in the bush. They had done wrong to me, so they set me free” (Personal interview, 4/1/2008). This is well known tale to the youth in Northern Uganda who were forced to participate in the brutal killings of their family members. While atrocities were committed widely across the region, forcing a child to torture or kill his or her own family members, earned the child a free pass back home. Some argue that the children are released by the LRA because they know the children have no one to return to, having killed their family members or being rejected for killing a relative. Many children choose to return home after escaping or being released from the LRA, but have been rejected by their family members. A vast number of the families believed their children had willingly joined the LRA forces and therefore the children could not be trusted (Moses, Personal interview, 4/3/08). Some were unable to trust their children, knowing they were capable of killing and torturing people, as they had done for years. For others, the children were living reminders of the atrocious acts they had in one way or another inflicted upon their family. For other children who witnessed or participated in killing their entire family, the LRA often became a family of sorts because they knew there was nothing to return to if they were not a part of the rebel army. As a result of the war that has lasted 22 years, a great number of children have no homes or families to return to and thus, remain orphans in IDP camps. For some, returning home and facing

their family members after being a member of the LRA can be too hard and they choose to begin their lives somewhere new.

Escapees return to vulnerable IDP camps where they run the risk of being abducted again. It is a difficult process for many to be displaced into IDP camps after acceptance into their communities diminishes as an option because cultural upheaval and economic instability present themselves as crippling factors. Communities are often reluctant to accept children who have been abducted because they fear the LRA will return in search of the escaped children. Girl escapees, often bearing the extra burden of children born in captivity and status as rape victims, face social ostracism (Uganda Conflict Action Network, 2006).

Aside from the fear of being re-abducted, raped, or killed in the IDP camps, the sanitary conditions added an extra level of danger for displaced persons. With children making up more than half of the world's refugee and IDP populations, the future of these communities is seriously at risk. Hick explains that many die within the first days and weeks of displacement due to malnutrition and disease, especially measles, diarrheal disease, respiratory infections, and malaria. Displaced children are also the most likely to be raped, tortured, murdered, or recruited as child soldiers (2001). To date, over 1.5 million people have been forced to live in IDP camps in Northern Uganda (Uganda Conflict Action Network, 2007).

Summary

At the peak of night commuting, 40,000 children were traveling from their homes nightly in search of safety, sleeping at hospitals, schools, or NGO compounds transformed into sleeping grounds. For many, this proved to be a successful mission and they avoided the wrath of the LRA. For at least 25,000 other children, abduction, coercion, or voluntary recruitment earned them active roles in the LRA forces. While in the bush, children were forced to be spies, porters, cooks, combatants, and sexual slaves, and rarely carried only one role. Living a life with the LRA was highly undesirable for many, so they attempted escape, some finding refuge in unsanitary, dangerous IDP camps. Others still were set free by the LRA as a result of the atrocities that had been performed on their family members by the LRA. Regardless of the mode of exiting the LRA's ranks, children continue to find their homes destroyed or in cultural and economic upheaval and many are forced to live in IDP camps that provide little safety and peace of mind.

Chapter 3: Life After the War

Millions of people have been affected by the war in Northern Uganda. A great many have fought in the war, an unfathomable number of people have lost loved ones, and more than 1.5 million people have been displaced (UNICEF, 2008). The efforts made after the fighting ceased by the government and people of Uganda to rebuild their communities and people were extremely important in restoring the future of their children and of their country (Singer, 2005). This chapter focuses on the ways communities and organizations have taken action to provide rehabilitation and reintegration services to people who have been greatly affected by the war in Northern Uganda. I analyze the approach taken in the rehabilitation and reintegration process, arguing that the approach is not gendered and therefore does not take into account all of the psychological effects of the particular kinds of traumas that the girls go through. Even though rehabilitation programs describe their programs using an individualistic approach, there are many reasons why different protocols should be in place for handling the differences for girls. Boys and girls in the LRA were affected in different ways and thus require specific kinds of care based on their experiences. I conducted the majority of this research during a three-week period in Gulu and Kitgum municipalities in Northern Uganda. I conducted interviews with young adults whose lives have been deeply affected by the war, as well as people working with the affected individuals. I will reference several organizations

that are working to rehabilitate and reintegrate people who previously served as child soldiers in the LRA; however, I do not attempt to recognize every organization working with the rehabilitation and reintegration process in Northern Uganda.

The rehabilitation and reintegration is arguably one of the most important aspects of the peace and rebuilding process (Singer, 2005). The returnees need to develop skills for economic self-reliance and citizenship skills, such as teamwork, leadership, discipline, communication, and social responsibility. They need arenas in which they can identify and test their talents and develop healthy relationships (USAID, 2004). The complex process of rehabilitating and reintegrating people into a society involves not just the people who undergo treatment, but also the community members they wish to live among (Singer, 2005). Rehabilitation and reintegration programs need to create a hospitable environment for returnees and community members to interact and learn from one another, demount harmful stereotypes, and grow from one another's differing experiences. An inclusive rehabilitation program embraces all youth who could benefit, not just the most at-risk or marginalized. At-risk returnees need to be empowered to aspire to positions of community leadership. Good programming also creates viable outlets for youth to participate in community activities, giving them viable ways to be heard and including them in significant decision making on issues that affect them (USAID, 2004).

The complex processes of rehabilitation and reintegration are done simultaneously, using some of the rehabilitation activities as a means to reintegrate by including community members. For example, World Vision in Gulu hosts soccer games

and other sporting activities and invites people from the community to participate. Returnees are prepped on how to be prepared for ways others might react and on how they should respond if they feel certain emotions. Gatherings among those recently returned from captivity and the community members are monitored and secure, so they can freely interact and get used to socializing with one another (Single, Personal Interview, 4/14/08).

Organization of Reception Centers

Rehabilitation and reintegration processes most often begin at reception centers. Organizations such as Gulu Support for Children Organisation (GUSCO), World Vision, Kitgum Concerned Women's Association (KICWA), and Concerned Parent's Association (CPA) have coordinated centers that make services available to people who have recently returned from captivity. The reception centers provide a variety of services such as basic health care, counseling, games, spiritual sessions, traditional dance and drama lessons, as well as family tracing, among many other things.

The majority of reception centers including GUSCO, KICWA, and CPA have one reception center where admitted persons stay. Although most of the reception centers do not make clear distinctions between the needs of the boys and the girls, World Vision, has three reception centers, dividing young women returning with children of their own, adolescents including boys and girls, and adult former commanders. A shared common problem staff at the reception centers face is the rehabilitation of former LRA commanders. "Boys who were commanders [in the bush] want to act like they are

commanders [here], but we do not allow that” (Gratian, Personal Interview, 4/9/08). People who served commanding roles in the LRA frequently want to hold their status in the reception centers, aggressively telling others what to do, so the social workers and other personnel try to dismantle their mindset of controlling others (Robert, Personal Interview, 4/4/08). In the case of World Vision’s reception centers, the adult former commanders are completely separated from the other adolescents returning from the bush so they can focus specifically on their issues of control and violence and their typically longer period of time spent with the LRA (Single, Personal Interview, 4/14/08). This is a clear example of an intentional, yet unrecognized, gendered tool used in the rehabilitation for boys. Women rarely ever took on the role of commanders in the LRA, thus this necessary approach the reception centers take is geared only towards aggressive boys returning from the bush.

The other reception centers divide the living quarters by sex, but have one center where everyone interacts during shared activities and group counseling sessions. A social worker at GUSCO reception center explained that boys and girls are encouraged to engage in activities together and communicate because while their experiences in the bush may have been quite isolated from one another, once they return to their communities, their daily activities will require interaction with people from the opposite sex (Gratian, Personal Interview, 4/9/08). GUSCO does not support separated reception centers for this reason and because of the belief that separating people based on their experiences, shared or differing, or on their genders, will in turn create stigmatization among groups within the centers (Robert, Personal Interview, 4/4/08).

Admission to Reception Centers

Admission into the reception centers occurs voluntarily; however, the UPDA's Child Protection Unit (CPU) recommends people to centers based on the person's country of origin. The voluntary admission into reception centers has served as one of its greatest benefits and one of the largest disadvantages to some of those most in need of support. It is beneficial because people returning from captivity can choose to go or not based on their own needs. Those who cope in other fashions may not believe they are in need of the services the reception centers provide. Many others are in desperate need of psychological, medical, or material support, but may not go to the reception centers because they are unaware they exist, their family members refuse to allow them to go, or a variety of other reasons. Acomo Florence explains, "My father did not want me to go to a rehabilitation center because they might keep me away from them for a longer period of time and they wanted me home with them" (Personal Interview, 4/1/2008). Unfortunately this is not an uncommon tale for young women who have undergone extreme traumas in captivity. Many of their family members fear they will be exposed to more dangers and they insist on keeping them at home where they believe it is safe. This can do a great injustice to those who are in dire need of psychological aid such as the traumas caused by repeated rapes, giving birth while still in their years of childhood, and social exclusions that accompany these traumas. Due to the voluntary admission, an estimated one half of male youth and one third of female youth pass through a reception center, giving reason for researchers to quote the reception centers as highly inadequate especially for girls (Annan, 2007).

Counseling and Psychosocial Support

Counseling and psychosocial support is a focal point for many of the reception and rehabilitation programs. In the context of this thesis, psychosocial support refers to examination of the psychological development in conjunction with the social environment in which one lives (Machel, 2001). GUSCO, World Vision, KICWA, and CPA, all explained their approach to effectively providing counseling services is considered individualistic, striving to offer psychosocial services in a fashion that is appropriate for the individual rather than using a protocol designated for one or a few groups of people. Their individualistic approach places a person with a social worker of the same gender who does an initial assessment of the person's psychological health. The social worker then meets with the person at least once a week, increasing the number of counseling sessions if the person is believed to have advanced symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or other high risk psychological issues. At some reception centers such as GUSCO, returnees are given an average of 50 days from the day they enter the center to go through the program and then are returned to family members or the communities they had belonged to (Robert, Personal Interview, 4/4/08). For cases where the returnee shows signs of PTSD or other high-risk psychological disorders, they are allowed to stay until the social worker finds the returnee is at an acceptable psychological state to leave the center.

In addition to individual counseling, group counseling sessions are offered as a means for returnees to share collective experiences, learning and potentially growing from hearing other people's stories and sympathizing with them. KICWA offers group

counseling sessions, referring to them as “storytelling times,” where returnees were given the opportunity to engage in healthy recollection of positive life experiences. Group counseling has proved to be beneficial because it allows returnees to speak and divulge information as they desire, or to just listen to other people, a luxury that individual counseling does not necessarily offer. Returnees have found that listening to other people talk about similar situations and the ways in which they have coped to be therapeutic.

Through this dual method, the people in the reception centers are able to share their stories with one person or several, listen to other people’s stories, sympathize with other returnees, or cope, as they desire. The goal is to provide ample opportunities for individuals to effectively manage the pain associated with their traumatic experiences. Furthermore, social workers are able to monitor the status of one or many of the returnees through multiple means of therapy and in turn, can choose to manipulate group conversations in a direction that can be beneficial to the returnees.

Social Services and Therapies in the Reception Centers

A variety of social services are made available to people who enter the reception center including drawing therapy, traditional dance, music, and drama lessons, and organized sporting events. During the height of KICWA’s reception center days, they had structured storytelling sessions where children were able to share tales from their lives prior to or after their time in captivity, to remind them of the joy and happiness they felt (Odongpiny, Personal Interview, 4/10/08). GUSCO offered sensitization programs where children shared their accounts from captivity on the radio (Gratian, Personal

Interview, 4/9/08). This activity served several purposes. It allowed community members to hear stories of those who had lived in captivity, giving them a chance to hear that most of the children did not voluntarily join the LRA forces and they did not want to take part in the atrocities they had committed against so many people. People who were still fighting in the bush were told the government would kill them if they tried to return back home, so this showed them that people who had returned were still alive and many used this as encouragement to return home. Lastly, it serves a time for people to call in questions they have for ex-child soldiers and receive instantaneous answers (Gratian, Personal Interview, 4/9/08). Drawing therapy is a common form of therapy used at reception centers. The returnees are given time, space, and the tools to draw, sometimes on a given topic, and other times on a chosen topic. It allows youth to express their current feelings freely and the social workers are able to analyze the status of the person, making sure to address certain points that are apparent in the person's drawings. For example, a person who consistently draws images of people dying or dead, guns, LRA fighters, or blood, but does not talk about any of these issues may be affected by his or her experiences in a way that he or she does not yet know how to express. These images as well as others associated with death and war are common among returnees' drawings, but after some time spent at the reception centers, they may begin to draw other images that relate to happier times in their lives or future dreams (Odongpiny, Personal Interview, 4/10/08).

Each of the reception centers I visited demonstrated confidence that teaching traditional dance, song, and dramatic performances provided the returnees with a sense of

culture they lost while they were in captivity. The reception centers use the performances as an opportunity to teach the returnees messages about peace and non-violent methods of problem solving. The performances engage returnees and community members alike in active, cultural, and peaceful activities, helping to bridge the sometimes-hostile gap between the two groups. Depending on the length of time the child soldiers spent in the bush, they may not have learned their traditional songs and dances, an important aspect of Acholi culture. Laroo Boarding School for war affected children offers classes on traditional dance and drama, teaching children war dances, return rituals, and creative dance among others. Social workers found that the deepest set emotions came out, not during counseling sessions, but through drawing or dance lessons. Social workers benefit from being able to monitor these activities and incorporate some of the emotion or issues into dramatic performances or group counseling sessions, merging similar issues for several returnees who do not actively discuss such issues (Romney, Personal Interview, 4/15/08).

Sporting events coordinated by reception centers frequently invite community members to join because their involvement aids in the reintegration process, bringing together the two groups in a less obvious way, gathering over a topic in which they share an interest. As previously discussed in this chapter, social and cultural activities are offered at reception and rehabilitation centers as a means of uplifting spirits of the returnees, educating them on traditional aspects of their cultures, and bringing together returnees and community members in a positive, controlled, active way. In addition to

these functions, the social services double as forms of therapy, allowing returnees to safely express themselves and be unobtrusively monitored by social workers.

Fostering Leadership Among Returnees

Creating leadership opportunities for returnees at the reception centers is an important aspect of rehabilitating, as it encourages youth to aspire to acquire leadership positions and do well for themselves (USAID, 2004). World Vision reception centers appoint a line of leadership whose responsibilities include basic authoritative tasks such as organizing the returnees at designated times, enforcing curfews, and helping newly returnees to adjust to life in the reception center (Single, Personal Interview, 4/14/08). As the transition period from captivity to their everyday lives, it is necessary to create opportunities for the returnees to have power and see the positive affects of using the power to help others rather than manipulate situations as they had seen in the bush. Distinguishing between positive leadership roles and the previous leadership roles some of the children held while in the LRA is difficult for many of the youth, especially those who continue to desire commanding roles while in the reception centers. Reception centers address this issue by identifying youth who may not have had active leadership roles before or during the war and giving them the opportunity to rise to the occasion. Furthermore, they attempt to create a dynamic where former commanders are not at liberty to instruct other youth on how to behave or react to a situation and can get used to taking instructions from other people.

Desensitization

Desensitization is a vital part of the rehabilitation and reintegration process to both the children returning to the communities and to the community members. People who remained at home or were moved to IDP camps may not understand that most of the people who left and fought with the LRA were abducted and were forced to commit many of the atrocities they carried out on their own loved ones. Prior to a vast effort to desensitize communities, many of the community members believed the children chose to join the LRA and would return as corrupt and violent, and would perpetuate the war in the IDP camps and villages. This made it extremely difficult for community members to trust the returnees and as a result, many were ostracized and faced discrimination.

Widespread desensitization programs by the reception centers and a great number of other Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) helped to dismantle some of the common stereotypes communities held and helped to educate them on the positive results of effectively reuniting returnees with communities (Robert, Personal Interview, 4/4/08).

The reception centers offered desensitization activities both as a means of reintegrating and for returnees to understand why community members might view them in a certain way and how they may be able to approach the situation. Some organizations such as GUSCO, CPA, and Information for Youth Empowerment Program (IYEP) host discussions where community members are invited to speak on certain issues and open dialogue concerning issues important to them.

Reintegration

The reintegration process begins with the rehabilitation, continues with reunion of family members, and is followed by check-ups by social workers. Throughout the course of a stay at the reception centers the former child soldiers engage in a variety of activities with community members, undergo lessons on how to interact with people who were not in captivity and may not understand what they went through. The social workers assigned to the children contact family members, if possible, and inform them of the status of their children. This process is particularly difficult for many family members who believed their children had been killed during the war or others who believed their children willingly left to fight with the LRA. The families are then counseled on how to respond to some of the difficulties their child has experienced and what issues could possibly arise in the near future. For the unfortunate ones whose family members were killed or cannot be found, the social workers attempt to locate distant family members or prepare the ex-child soldiers to live on their own (Robert, Personal Interview, 4/4/08).

A Needed Gendered Approach to Rehabilitation

Staff at each of the reception centers I met with, including GUSCO, World Vision, KICWA, and CPA, described their programming as individualist, treating each person's conditions rather than treating various groups based on shared experiences. I argue that while their approach is individualistic in many ways, providing personal counseling and psychosocial services and reconnecting returnees with their families and communities, their approach to rehabilitation also needs to be gendered in order to fully

address the different needs of boys and girls. “Conflict affects women and girls differently from men and boys. It is impossible to talk about effective humanitarian responses or inclusive peace processes without understanding and taking into account these gender dimensions” (Heyzer in Machel, 2001). Singer notes that women ex-child soldiers are 52 percent more likely to commit suicide than men ex-child soldiers (2005). As a social construct, gender roles vary from one culture to another, and it is impossible to remove gender completely. Thus, while the approaches are individualistic, gearing techniques towards each person’s individual needs, the programs also need to be gendered, recognizing that the needs of a boy and a girl ex-child soldier are not the same. In failing to identify the needs of boy and girl ex-child soldiers as separate and different, the rehabilitation processes are unequal. Several measures have been put in place by reception centers to dismount the mindset boy child soldiers who held commanding roles in the LRA; however, self-esteem and confidence are rarely discussed when addressing girls who were repeatedly raped. The psychological needs of a boy who was a fighter are far different than that of a girl who was raped and gave birth to a child, as are the consequences each of them face upon return to their communities. A boy may face discrimination for his actions, but a child mother has the added factors of personal injuries and a child to constantly remind her and those around her of past-lived experiences.

GUSCO, World Vision, KICWA, and CPA all offer individual and group counseling. They also make a variety of other optional programming available to returnees, with the belief that not every program will be appealing to one person, but with

a wide array of programs available, at least one will spark the interest of every returnee. The programming is described as individualistic and inclusive, not divisive (Robert, Personal Interview, 4/4/08). For this reason, they do not intentionally use a gendered approach in the rehabilitation and reintegration process. According to Okeny Robert, dividing the returnees based on gender has the potential to create more stereotypes and harmful divides among the returnees themselves (Personal Interview, 4/4/08). Naturally, groups form as returnees find commonalities among themselves and their interests.

According to Acholi custom, the child belongs to the father and in cases of gang rape where the father is unknown, the family disowns the mother, leaving the child and the mother without the social support that many male returnees who fathered children benefit from. Women who were married prior to being abducted are rarely accepted back by their husbands because of children they may have had while in the bush or for fear they contracted Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) or HIV/AIDS (Human Rights Watch, 2007).

One aspect of the rehabilitation and reintegration process at the reception centers that I found alarming is the assumed role of the women as the primary caretaker. World Vision completely separates the child mothers from other girls and boys their age, putting them in a reception center all their own (Single, Personal Interview, 4/14/08). Their needs are far different from those of a former commander or fighter and therefore require special attention (Human Rights Watch, 2007). GUSCO, KICWA, and CPA all offer parenting classes to the female returnees who mothered children while in captivity. These classes provide general education on how to care for a child. Where is the

education for the father or future fathers? Women in this situation are forced to endure the pain of rape and its consequences alone. Men are not expected to take responsibility for the children they fathered nor are they given classes on how to parent children they may father in the future. As a result of women serving as the assumed primary caretaker in this situation, their education often becomes a lower priority because it is necessary for the woman to earn an income for herself and her child. Marilyn Waring (1999) explains, “The basic definitions and concepts into the male analyses of production and reproduction also reflect an unquestioned acceptance of biological determinism. Women’s household and child care work are seen as an extension of their physiology”.

I argue that while the approach to many of the programs is individualistic, it is necessary to have a gendered approach in order for both boys’ and girls’ needs to be fully met. Without a system for dealing with the unique problems that the women face, and by neglecting to hold the boys accountable for the children they have fathered, this approach privileges the needs of the boys over the girls. In this case, women are provided with necessary parenting classes, many of them becoming mothers far before they desired or were prepared. What clearly defines this privileging the needs of boys is the expectation that while men are the biological fathers of children, in action they serve no such role. Regardless of the woman’s choice in becoming a mother, she is expected to care for the child. The same situation for a man has the opposite outcome.

The long-term effects women face in this situation also are far different than what a man experiences. In many instances, the physical and emotional effects on women are tremendous. A nurse at the World Vision reception center reported that from 2002 to

2003 about 50 percent of the women who had previously been wives to commanders had STIs. From 2000 to 2002, the rates were significantly higher, at approximately 85 percent (Human Rights Watch, 2003). Women, as the assumed primary caregivers, then run the additional risk of leaving their children as orphans, if they lack adequate health care, a reality for most ex-child soldier mothers in Northern Uganda.

Men and women both return from the bush with STIs; however, women also often suffer from fistulas, incontinence, and irreparable tears from frequently being raped. As a result, many women lose the ability to control their bladders and bowels. In addition to the social exclusion that tends to go along with such health conditions, women struggle to work and find a means to survive. Without financial support from families or through employment, receiving health care is not an option for many women.

The men who return from the bush as ex-child soldiers may face discrimination and rejection because of their past experiences; however, they are not expected to attend to the needs of the children they fathered during the war. Furthermore, no one assumes that men will care for the women whom they impregnated, raped, or given STIs. The long-term affects women face are far greater with the assumed role as the primary caregiver and the responsibilities associated with that role, possible life-long internal damage, and social exclusion. As a result, I argue that in failing to fully identify the differing needs of women and young mothers as a group and to establish a protocol for working with their unique needs, the rehabilitation process is unequal.

Summary

The complex rehabilitation and reintegration process begins most often at reception centers, providing a safe and helpful transition location for ex-child soldiers returning from the bush. Centers such as GUSCO, World Vision, KICWA, and CPA offer a wide variety of services including basic health care, psychosocial services, and family tracing, which allow the returnees to receive assistance through many different avenues before returning to their communities. While the approach is indeed individualistic, as it is so often claimed to be, it is an approach that fails to acknowledge that the problems facing these returning child soldiers are gendered and that treatment needs to be different in many significant ways. Women, as the mothers of children born in captivity, are expected to care for their children while the male counterparts are not even associated with the children they have fathered. As a result, women encounter more difficulties returning to school because their income becomes a necessity in order to support themselves and their children, forcing education to become a lower priority. Men have more flexibility because they are caring only for themselves and not the children they fathered while in the bush.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I analyze the approach taken in the rehabilitation and reintegration process, arguing that the needs of the returning soldiers are gendered and that the rehabilitation processes do not fully take into account all of the physical or psychological effects of the traumas that girl ex-child soldiers endure. Despite rehabilitation programs describing their programs as using an individualistic approach, there are many reasons why different protocols should be in place when treating the girl ex-child soldiers. Boys and girls in the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) were affected in different ways and thus require care based on their experiences. I argue that in recognizing the additional needs of former commanders, who were nearly always men, and failing to acknowledge the needs of and to establish rehabilitation protocols for women, the rehabilitation process is unequal.

I discuss the background of the current day conflict in Northern Uganda, explaining that it be traced back to the 1980's when Yoweri Museveni, Uganda's current day president, gained control in 1986. It is embedded within a larger regional crisis involving the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Northern Sudan, and several different communities within Uganda. I highlight some of the key players in the twenty-two year long conflict such as former presidents Milton Obote and Idi Amin as well as the rebel armies, the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) and the LRA. While the HSM and

LRA were not the first armies in Uganda to use child soldiers, they are recognized as being made up almost solely of child soldiers. As a result of the two decade long war, more than 1.5 have been displaced to squalid Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps (UNICEF, 2008).

I explain the ways children have joined the LRA's forces, tasks they take on while in captivity, the ways they work to avoid abduction, and how they manage to leave the LRA. Additionally, I describe what life is like for many after leaving captivity and living in IDP camps. For at least 25,000 children, abduction, coercion, or voluntary recruitment earned them active roles in the LRA forces (UNICEF, 2008). While in the bush, children were forced to be spies, porters, cooks, combatants, and sexual slaves, and rarely carried only one role. Living a life with the LRA was highly undesirable for many, so they attempted escape, some finding refuge in unsanitary, dangerous IDP camps. Others still were set free by the LRA as a result of the atrocities that had been performed on their family members by the LRA. Regardless of the mode of exiting the LRA's ranks, children continue to find their homes destroyed or in cultural and economic upheaval and many are forced to live in IDP camps that provide little safety and peace of mind.

Lastly, I examine the complex rehabilitation and reintegration process that often begins at reception centers, providing a safe and helpful transition location for ex-child soldiers returning from the bush. Centers such as Gulu Support for Children Organisation (GUSCO), World Vision, Kitgum Concerned Women's Association (KICWA), and Concerned Parent's Association (CPA) offer a wide variety of services including basic

health care, psychosocial services, and family tracing. These services allow returnees to receive assistance through many different avenues before returning to their communities. I argue that while the rehabilitation approach for most of the reception centers is indeed individualistic, as it is so often claimed to be, it fails to acknowledge the need for a gendered approach. Women, as the mothers of children born in captivity, are expected to care for their children while the male counterparts are not even associated with the children they have fathered. As a result, women encounter more difficulties returning to school, as income becomes a necessity in order to support herself and her child, a luxury a man does in the same situation does not face. Furthermore, official measures are put in place to break down the mindset of aggressive former LRA commanders, who are men. Women who served as fighters or wives do not receive additional care for trauma they may experience as a result of being constantly raped. The long-term affects women face are far greater with the assumed role as the primary caregiver and the responsibilities associated with that role, possible life-long internal damage, and social exclusion. As a result, I argue that in failing to fully identify the differing needs of women and young mothers as a group, the rehabilitation is unequal.

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