Check for updates

Children Born of Rebel Captivity: Politics and Practices of Integration in Uganda

Allen Kiconco *

Department of Political Studies, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

Many studies have documented and analyzed the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) forced conjugal association patterns and practices ("forced marriage"). However, the focus has been on the experiences of abducted girls forced to serve as conjugal partners to commanders ("forced wives"). The experiences of children born as a result of these relationships are under-investigated. Receptor communities in northern Uganda are assumed to be places of hope, comfort, and protection for these children. However, they can also be hostile, leaving the children in precarious and vulnerable situations. This article draws from ethnographic fieldwork in the Acholi region and interviews with formerly abducted mothers focusing on their children's integration processes and experiences. It argues that return is not integration, as it often coincides with further exclusion and alienation. In Uganda's patriarchal and patrilineal social systems, children with no paternal lineage are viewed as of lower status. Stigmatization facing children born of the LRA captivity condemns them to this status, consequently excluding them from mainstream society. Findings show that stigma remains central to the life experiences of these children several years after the end of the conflict in 2006. Their persistent stigmatization is linked to broader discriminatory socio-cultural and patriarchal ideas and practices.

Keywords: conflict and gender, abduction, forced marriage, children, integration, Uganda

INTRODUCTION

Girls have been widely recruited in recent African wars, including Libera, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Nigeria. In most of these wars, as in northern Uganda, armed groups and militias target and abduct girls to join their campaign of violence against their governments. In rebel custody, their abductors subject them to sexual violence, sexual slavery, forced marriage, and forced pregnancy to fill their military units (McKay and Mazurana, 2004; Carlson and Mazurana, 2008; Coulter, 2009; Baines, 2017). Abducted girls and their experiences have attracted substantial research and policy analysis from researchers, practitioners, and the international community, bringing these experiences to the forefront of international debate. However, this analysis and intervention tend to ignore or overlook their children's experiences born during these girls' time with rebels (Watson, 2007; Carpenter, 2010a; Veale et al., 2013; Denov, 2015; Theidon, 2015; Seto, 2016; Lee, 2017; Baines and Oliveira, 2020).

The characteristic of the harm the children suffer "renders their status as a victim group elusive" (Di Eugenio and Baines, 2021: 327). Since no harm is perpetrated directly against them, the children are seen as secondary victims of wartime abduction, captivity, and sexual violence. Nevertheless, experience shows that they endure ongoing harms in post-conflict societies (Goodhart, 2007; Carpenter, 2010b; Apio, 2016; Seto, 2016; Lee, 2017; Eramian and Denov, 2018). The harms they

"endure are structural and cultural, forms of violence in which a single perpetrator or specific transgression is difficult to discern" (Di Eugenio and Baines, 2021: 329).

While their suffering is entangled with their parents' predicament, the focus continues to be on their parents. On the one hand, their fathers are perceived as perpetrators and criminals who should be prosecuted, including those abducted as children and turned into "forced fathers" (Baines, 2009; Aijazi and Baines, 2017; Denov et al., 2019). Viewed as potential aggressors of post-conflict peace, they are given priority in designing and implementing Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) interventions (IDDRS, 2006). On the other, the presence of children is seen as worsening mothers' situation during and after conflict (see Carlson and Mazurana, 2008; Veale et al., 2013; Atim et al., 2018). The children continue to fall through the cracks of policy frameworks (Carpenter, 2010a). Critical policy documents on child soldiering recognize "child/girl mothers" as a particularly vulnerable group, needing explicit attention and consistent follow-up within post-conflict societies (see, e.g., Paris Principles, 2007; UNICEF, 2009). The reproductive rights agenda informs such perspectives, whose advocates see children as a side effect of their mothers' suffering (Carpenter, 2010a). Available research is directed at mothers and their role in caring and providing for their children (see Mukangendo, 2007; Veale et al., 2013; Shanahan and Veale, 2016; Atim et al., 2018; Denov et al., 2018). Yet, children might have some needs that are more complex and in tension with mothers' needs. Society's understanding of these children and their wellbeing often conflicts and causes tension with their human rights, needs, and interests (Lee, 2017: 171–172).

Children born of wartime sexual violence are yet to be recognized and appreciated in their own right. Their unique and complex needs remain unacknowledged and comprehensively undiagnosed (Carpenter, 2010a,b; Apio, 2016; Hamel, 2016; Seto, 2016; Lee, 2017). Notably, there is a lack of research about how their integration unfolds and how they navigate problems and tensions resulting from their existence in receptor communities. Di Eugenio and Baines (2021) propose a survivor-centered approach to study these children, drawing on their lived experiences and realities. They emphasize that the approach recognizes and foregrounds their agency as sites of reproducing societal norms, ultimately contributing to post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction processes.

One of the legacies of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency in northern Uganda is the birth of thousands of children by girls, abducted and subjected to forced marriage and early pregnancy by commanders (Carlson and Mazurana, 2008; Apio, 2016; Baines, 2017; Kiconco, 2021a). Born in the LRA camps in northern Uganda, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and recently the Central Africa Republic, many children find their way to receptor communities in the north of Uganda. They join these communities to seek survival, comfort, and protection.

Studies have explored these children's integration processes in northern Uganda. They are not explicitly included in DDR and post-conflict recovery programmes. The government provided women returnees with a basic reintegration package and no additional support for women returning with children (Ladisch, 2015; Neenan, 2017). The debate for a national reparations programme addressing these children and their needs, including land ownership and access to specialized rehabilitation, continues.

Children rely on several strategies to support their integration, including participating in welcoming ceremonies and ritual cleansing, cultural naming, adapting to changing family structures and managing disclosure (Shanahan and Veale, 2016). Some decide to trace their fathers or families to legitimize their identity, consequently holding paternal kin relations responsible for their belonging and welfare (Stewart, 2015; Atim et al., 2018; Baines and Oliveira, 2020; Tinashe et al., 2020). Indeed, when fathers or paternal families assume responsibility for their identity and future wellbeing, the experience significantly secures the children's best interests (Oliveira and Baines, 2020). The children also construct their identities based on the past LRA memories, reconstruct identities, navigate stigma, and envision future selves (Stewart, 2017; Denov and Piolanti, 2020). They view education as a tool to support their integration, seen as a meaningful way to boost their prospects (Stewart, 2017; Ojok, 2021).

However, the integration contexts in northern Uganda remain highly charged, constrained, and potentially insecure for these children. Yet they have to integrate into these contexts, needing multiple support systems to ensure protection and survival (Denov and Lakor, 2017). In the LRA, they often lived with both parents, affording them a sense of social identity, status, belonging, and love. In the receptor communities, their status and situation are complicated. Experience shows that initial integration experience often involves families welcoming their daughters and children. However, when the return excitement wanes, the situation becomes problematic (Veale et al., 2013; Opiyo, 2015; Apio, 2016; Shanahan and Veale, 2016). In wider communities, violence, and rejection in many situations dominate experiences of this return in northern Uganda (ibid). From a long-term perspective, their integration is characterized by stigma, abuse and exclusion, and issues of identity and belonging (Denov and Lakor, 2017; Stewart, 2017, 2020; Baines and Oliveira, 2020).

The consensus in the literature is that stigmatization is the dominant challenge facing these children and their integration in northern Uganda. They receive stigmatization from sections of society, making their lives unbearable and excluding them from mainstream society (Shanahan and Veale, 2016; Baines and Oliveira, 2020; Stewart, 2020). They are "perceived as proxy members of the LRA, symbols of misfortune, and stereotyped as violent, unproductive, unequal members of society" (Neenan, 2017: 34). They are segregated in the host families and have a lower status compared to their mates with never-abducted parents (Opiyo, 2015). Their stigmatization is compounded by everyday broader patriarchal discriminatory socio-cultural ideas, norms, and practices (Apio, 2016; Atim et al., 2018).

Patriarchy and patrilineality significantly contribute to their contested identities, as paternity ties determine access to social identity, belonging and status, and resources, particularly land. Clan members are often reluctant to accept children considered

not of the clan, including born out of wedlock or with unknown fathers, as with most LRA men (Opiyo, 2015; Apio, 2016; Atim et al., 2018). Because they have no paternity ties, the LRA parented children are displaced from Acholi personhood (Schulz, 2018). Their suffering is broadly a consequence of their illegitimate status at birth, which results in their ongoing stigmatization (Apio, 2016; Neenan, 2017; Atim et al., 2018). These intersecting oppressions create a sense of not belonging and integration failure among these children in northern Uganda (Stewart, 2020).

Integration does not take place in a vacuum but in a social-cultural framework. Many studies have highlighted the problem of stigmatization among these children in northern Uganda. However, fewer investigations attempt to problematize and contextualize this challenge. In her research in the Lango region, Eunice Apio explores these children's integration through normative frameworks of gender, motherhood and kinship. Apio discusses *rucurucu*, a cultural and social disorder and tension that followed the war and the LRA returnees, including forced marriage children. She observes that "This *rucurucu* gave rise to tensions over the reintegration of formerly abducted women and their children" (Apio, 2016: 6). Her study identifies links between the children's experiences and the cultural practices and politics controlling their mothers' sexual and reproductive lives. Much the same applied among the Acholi, where social harmony became difficult to maintain during and after the war (Porter, 2017). In Acholi society, social harmony "denotes a state of normal relations among the living and the dead, linked to an idea of cosmological equilibrium and a social balance of power and moral order" (Porter, 2017: 15). This experience suggests that "social harmony is the highest goal of the Acholi community" (Ofumbi, 2012: 116). Transgression of social harmony is heavily punishable with mob violence, organized revenge, collective killing or summary execution (Porter, 2017). The LRA captivity children are at the center of this social disharmony in Acholi, often expressed in everyday stigmatization and exclusion. Indeed, Stewart (2020: 113) observed that the children are stigmatized because they are seen as embodying the "insecurity and immorality of the war" in the Acholi region.

Studies often overlook such social disorders and their influence on the integration of the LRA captivity children in northern Uganda communities. Yet, applying them yields a more nuanced understanding of family and community treatment of these children and their mothers (see, e.g., Apio, 2016; Atim et al., 2018). This article situates itself within the emerging subfield of wartime sexual violence and integration that documents, theorizes, and contextualizes integration in northern Uganda.

The article explores the messiness of integration in using the analytical lens of stigma. According to Goffman (1963: 12), stigma is an "attribute that is deeply discrediting." Its presence of this attribute is invoked to reduce/devalue the person possessing it "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (p. 3). According to Pescosolido and Martin (2015: 91), stigma 'is the mark, the condition, or status that is subject to devaluation." From this understanding, the stigmatized person possesses (or is believed to possess) "some attribute or characteristic that conveys a social identity that is devalued in a particular social context"

(Crocker et al., 1998: 505). According to Goffman (1963), society views such persons as possessing "an undesirable difference," and they are stigmatized based on what society considers "different" or "deviant," applied through codes, rules, and sanctions.

This classic view of stigma draws from the lived experiences of people who have physical deformities, suffer from mental illness or are perceived to practice deviant behavior, including criminal behavior. Notably, these definitions and characterizations of stigma share the assumption that the stigmatized person is born with this "deeply discrediting attribute." This implies that both the mark and their consequent experiences are relatively static, as the attribute that defines them as different perpetually marks them as devalued in the eyes of society.

However, some studies argue that stigmatized persons are not different from "normal" people but engage in the same life processes as "normal" people (Crocker et al., 1998; Dijker and Koomen, 2007; MacDonald and Kerali, 2020). Link and Phelan (2001: 366) argue that "stigma or mark is seen as something in the person rather than a designation or tag that others affix to the person." However, Cumming and Cumming (1965: 449–50) assert that "whether it is a visible mark or an invisible stain, stigma acquires its meaning through the emotion it generates within the person bearing it and the feeling and behavior toward him of those affirming it. These two aspects of stigma are indivisible, as they each act as a cause or effect of the other." Nevertheless, experience shows "stigma might be best considered to be the negative perceptions and behaviors of so called-normal people to all individuals who are different from themselves" (English, 1971: 5). To the non-stigmatized person, the discrediting attribute reduces the stigmatized person's character/persona to that which is deemed "stained," "polluted," "devalued," "spoiled," "flawed," and "inferior" (Crocker et al., 1998). Such stigma is widely recognized as a problem for children of LRA captivity in northern Uganda. While this stigma is continually changing and resisted, social, cultural, and patriarchal processes underpin and inform its persistence. The findings discussed below corroborate Goffman's recommendation that the conceptualization of stigma needs "a language of relationships, not attributes" (Goffman, 1963: 3).

The article examines the socio-cultural situation facing children born within the LRA. It focuses on processes of socialization, establishing social relations and kinship ties to ensure survival and safety in post-conflict northern Uganda. It draws from ethnographic fieldwork and interview with 40 formerly abducted mothers in the Acholi region, focusing on their children's integration. Therefore, the findings presented and discussed in this article are based on mothers' perspectives of their children's situation. The findings show that the children's background as conceived or born with the LRA rebel group has led to no easy integration arising from problems associated with their stigmatized identity, both as children and former members of the LRA. Three key sources of stigmatization emerge in the data: born in the bush, association with the rebellion and illegitimacy at birth. The article reveals the messiness of integration in northern Uganda by unpacking these sources. The central argument here is that return is not integration, as it often coincides with further exclusion and

alienation. In Uganda's patriarchal and patrilineal social systems, children with no paternal lineage are viewed as of lower status. Stigmatization facing the LRA children condemns them to this status, consequently excluding them from mainstream society. Stigma is thus a valuable concept to understand their everyday experiences and the challenges they face in their attempt to integrate into receptor communities.

To appreciate the context within which this discussion is situated, it is perhaps important at this point to chart the events and the situation leading to the abduction of these children's mothers (and sometimes fathers) from their communities into the LRA rebellion.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT: THE LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY INSURGENCY

The Acholi area is one of the seven sub-regions of Uganda.[1] For two decades (1986–2006), the area was the scene of the conflict between the Government of Uganda and the LRA.[2] While the conflict escalated to affect other parts of Northern and North-Eastern Uganda, most victims have been the Acholi people. The LRA emerged in late 1987 in response to the seizure of power by the southern-based rebellion, National Resistance Army (NRA), renamed in 1995, Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF). The LRA leader, Joseph Kony, was a soldier and self-proclaimed spiritual leader from Odek community of the Acholi region, who went to wage war on the Ugandan Government forces (Dolan, 2009; Branch, 2011). Starting as a relatively unknown figure, Kony gained notoriety for his kidnapping and forcibly recruiting child combatants into his army (Pham et al., 2007; Annan et al., 2008; Blattman and Annan, 2010).

It is estimated that the group abducted 54,000–75,000 people, including 25,000–38,000 children (Pham et al., 2007). Approximately 30% of the group were girls (McKay and Mazurana, 2004). These abductions frequently resulted in years of captivity, with victims being forced to become agents of terror and violence against their own families and communities. Girl abductees were socialized and forced to serve as sexual partners to commanders. Boys were also socialized to take on abducted girls as wives later. Many children were born out of these "forced marriages" (Carlson and Mazurana, 2008; Apio, 2016; Baines, 2017; Kiconco, 2021a).

The Government of Uganda resolved to prevent the LRA from forcibly recruiting children into their guerrilla army by establishing Internally Displaced People's (IDPs) Camps. By 2001 about 1.7 million civilians were forced to relocate to these camps (Dolan, 2009). The IDPs catered for two cohorts: the majority who government forces had moved from communities, and

those who had escaped, been released by LRA commanders, or captured by the Ugandan army.

In another attempt to restore peace, on 16 December 2003, the Ugandan government referred the situation in the north to the International Criminal Court (ICC). On 8 July 2005, the ICC prosecutor officially issued arrest warrants for Joseph Kony and his top four allies/commanders for war crimes and crimes against humanity (Allen, 2005). On 6 December 2016, Trial Chamber IX of the ICC commenced its trial against Dominic Ongwen, one of the five LRA commanders indicted. Ongwen was accused of 70 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Presently, the other three are dead, and only Kony remains at large.[3]

On 6 May 2021, the court sentenced Ongwen to 25 years of imprisonment.[4] The trial was the first in which the ICC convicted a rebel commander for forced pregnancy as a war crime and a crime against humanity. It was also the first time that the ICC convicted forced marriage (charged under the category of "other inhumane acts"), constituting a crime against humanity. Being the first person to be charged for crimes "of which he is also a victim" (Baines, 2009: 163–164), Ongwen also represents 10,000 LRA ex-combatants holding such conflicting statuses in northern Uganda.[5] The ICC, human rights, and child protection organizations have been applauded for strengthening the criminalization of child recruitment and involvement in armed conflicts. However, in situations where all parties involved in forced conjugal associations happen to be minors turned into combatants, the conventional explanations and ensuing responses may be deficient. Moreover, the neglect of children born as a result of forced conjugal associations between child combatants and girls forced to marry them complicates the task.

When all peace efforts failed in northern Uganda, the LRA relocated itself to the vast bushy region between Uganda, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Central Africa Republic. Thus, a period of relative peace followed in northern Uganda, resulting in movements from IDP camps back to people's communities. The re-integration of ex-combatants, abductees, and children born of rebel captivity is ongoing.

Early research suggested that by the end of the war in 2006, most ex-combatants, formerly abducted persons and their children returned to their home communities and became productive members of society (e.g., Annan et al., 2008). However, a longer-term perspective shows the situation to be very different, with significant problems around their re-integration as a result of ostracism and exclusion (Apio, 2016; Shanahan and Veale, 2016; Denov and Lakor, 2018; Baines and Oliveira, 2020; Stewart, 2020; Kiconco, 2021a).

I now move the discussion to analyze the extent of the problem in relation to the integration of children born in the LRA in communities of the Acholi region. I am interested in how this manifests within the receptor home/community cultural setting, where in most cases, the children have joined their maternal

---

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

[2]The historical background and root causes of the conflict, and how it evolved over the years, have been well-documented (e.g., Behrend, 1999; Finnström, 2008; Dolan, 2009; Branch, 2011). This section restricts itself to an introductory snapshot that focuses on two key areas in this long-term evolution: abductions and mass displacement (which both provide an excuse for, as well as an indictment of conflict).

[3]Case available: Case Information Sheet—The Prosecutor v. Dominic Ongwen (ICC-cpi.int).

[4]Sentencing available at: CR2021_04230.PDF (ICC-cpi.int).

[5]See also the trial of Thomas Kwoyelo in the International Crime Division (ICD) of the Ugandan High Court (Macdonald and Porter, 2016).

families to live alongside their mothers. But first, a note on the research methodology and validity of the data is in order.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In 2012–2013, I carried out 6 months of ethnography in northern Uganda, undertaken for my doctoral research, which focused on LRA abductions, forced marriage, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction issues. The study examined the formerly abducted women's lived conflict and post-conflict experiences (Kiconco, 2021a). The research received ethical approval from my university and Uganda National Council for Science and Technology.

I was born and raised in the rural Ankole region, western Uganda. As an adolescent, I relocated to the capital, Kampala, in the central region. With this ethnic background and internal migration, I speak many Bantu languages spoken in Uganda's central and west, different from the Luo language spoken in the Acholi region. As a Munyankole (person from Ankole) woman working in northern Uganda for the first time, my project's success depended on recruiting an interpreter and transcriber to help with the research. Thus, the research team consisted of five people: two interpreters (man and woman), two male transcribers, and me, the researcher. However, I managed the fieldwork, data collection and analysis.

The research adopted in-depth interviews and observation as the methods of collecting data. The research team interviewed 40 formerly abducted women in the Acholi region's Gulu, Kitgum, Lamwo, and Pader districts. These women were accessed through rehabilitation centers and referrals *via* already interviewed women. They had had 68 children fathered by LRA men, including some who died in the LRA camps or once subsequently back home. During fieldwork, 58 children were still alive, 28 girls and 30 boys. Because I was not ethically equipped to interview the children, the study limited itself to observing them while working with their mothers. Therefore, the data on the children presented and discussed below was generated through interviews with their mothers.

The children's age at joining receptor communities ranged between 0 and 8 years, averaging 1.8 years. The majority, 75% ($n = 51$), were born and started their development within the LRA units and camps, while 25% ($n = 17$) were born upon their mothers' return home. Most children joined host communities in their early childhood years of 1–4 years. During fieldwork, the children's age ranged between 6 months and 17 years, averaging 9.5 years, with the majority 28.47% ($n = 19$) in the range 6–9 years.

These age brackets all fell within that of the childhood development cohort, the most important phase for the overall development of a human being. Experts in child development show that environmental influences are crucial in the brain and biological development in this stage of life. A child's experiences determine their health, education, and economic prospects overall. Any exposure to risk factors over a period will have its outcome later on in the person's behavior. Therefore, my data is a result of a scan of both immediate and long-term integration

processes and experiences and how they influenced the children's survival, safety, and relationships.

During fieldwork, the children were in diverse custodianships. As the table below shows, the majority, 34 children, lived with their mothers in different situations. Then 13 children lived with maternal grandparents, while nine with relatives. Two lived with LRA/biological fathers.

No. mothers and their children as single parents	No mothers and their children in new relationships (new partner or husband)	No. mothers and their children with LRA husbands	No. mothers and their children living with maternal clan (grandparents or extended family)
8 (13 children)	11 (15 children)	2 (6 children)	4 (7 children)

The goal of my research was hinged on tracking and exploring their integration through their mothers' perspectives. Mothers were asked to reflect on questions concerning the welfare and integration of their children. The interview guide included open-ended questions to guide the conversation. Some of these questions included:

- Can you please tell me what it was like for your children when you first returned home? How did your family/neighbors/friends welcome you and your children? How did this treatment make you feel about your children?
- How has the experience changed over time? Do you think the way your family and community treat your children has changed with time?
- Where are your children staying now, and how is their situation?
- Is the fact that the LRA man fathers your children affecting your relationship with your children? How do you view the effects on the children's integration?
- How do your new husband and in-laws treat your children?
- How do your family and community members treat your children now?
- Are there some people in your family and community who think better and worse of your children? Who thinks worse of them? Why do you think that is? Who thinks better? Why do you think that is?
- Do you feel you are supported with the upbringing of these children? Who supports you? Who do you think should be supporting them?
- What prospects do you have for your children?

The research generated a considerable amount of data from responses and accounts. It relied on a qualitative thematic content analysis approach to analyze the data. It applied Nvivo10 to organize, manage and analyze the data. First, the analysis process included familiarizing with the data by repeatedly reading interview scripts, comparing with field notes and making notes on potential themes, patterns, and categories. Secondly, all the transcribed interviews were transported from Microsoft word to the Nvivo10 for organizing, managing and bringing order to

the data. The move facilitated the inductive thematic/focused coding and analysis (Creswell, 2013). The theme of stigmatization emerged as a significant integration problem. The final analysis focused on finding the meaning behind this response to help understand the situation of the LRA captivity children. I draw on mothers' perspectives to provide evidence for the argument, using quotations to illustrate the broader set of life stories. Most interviewees gave expressed permission to use their correct details in data dissemination. But to protect their identities, I have anonymised all names and places.

INTEGRATION: ESTABLISHING SOCIAL RELATIONS, KINSHIP TIES AND ACCEPTANCE

When the children in this study exited the LRA rebellion with their mothers, reintegration agencies connected them with their maternal kin and communities. Indeed, when I visited the Acholi region in 2012/2013, I found most of them residing in rural areas, living in maternal familial units based on extended families. Consultations show that according to Acholi customary law and practice, children born out of wedlock belong to the mother and her clan. Therefore, integration for these children (born out of wedlock) thus meant joining maternal families and broader clan communities. With family serving as the entry point into society, socialization and the establishment of social relations and kinship ties, I cannot emphasize enough how crucial maternal families were to the children when they first entered society. Families created the initial integration space, providing socio-cultural, psychological, and economic support. The children then depended on the established familial relations to connect with clans and community networks. A woman who returned with two children stated:

> When I returned home, my family was supportive of my children and me. They were telling us things we could or could not do. They encouraged us to live freely with other people in the community. This [family support] helped us cope and relate with other people in the community.[6]

From the safety of the family unit, the children were supported in participating in neighborly activities, going to church, attending school, working with government and non-governmental organizations, and engaging with the broader society.

However, accounts show that initial integration often meant being part of diminished or dysfunctional immediate familial relations, forcing some children to rely on extended relatives or well-wishers to support their post-LRA lives. Mothers who returned to dead parents reflected that they and their children relied on relatives to sustain their lives in the initial days of returning home. Many interviewees described their responses through such social relation framings.

Several years after joining receptor communities, I found that the realities had not changed for most children in the sample.

Many still lived with their maternal kin, a move that allowed their mothers to pursue other reintegration strategies, including marriages and livelihoods (Kiconco and Nthakomwa, 2018; Kiconco, 2021b). They rarely saw their mothers, particularly those married in areas far from biological communities. Another category in the sample lived with their mothers, in new marriages, as single parents in their birth families, or alone in cheap town rentals.

However, this should not suggest that all family and extended relative unions were receptive to these children in northern Uganda. Indeed, family stigmatization in Acholi often forced children and their mothers to consider other options. Two mothers in the sample reflected on the events:

> When I was abducted, my mother was alive. She died during my captivity. When I came back home, I found my stepmother at home. We started living with her. We stayed with her for two weeks, but it was not a good experience. She used to talk ill of my child and me. She hated my child so much that she could say, 'I do not want to keep a bush child in my home'. She even told my father, 'if you want me to stay in your home, you have to remove this child from our home'. The abuse became too much, and we left.[7]

> If my child destroyed something at home, people reacted to him differently from other children with non-abducted parents. They always said many negative statements and words to him. People said statements like 'your father is a rebel, and you have his mentality.[8]

These examples were characteristic of many children who lived with their mothers in community trading centers and town settings. These mothers reported that their initial efforts to live with families in rural areas were unsuccessful, forcing them to relocate to new environments where they lived alone, taking care of themselves, children and other dependants. Thus, "recovery by urbanizing" became a reintegration strategy for these mothers and their children (Kiconco, 2021a; Kiconco and Nthakomwa, 2021).

Acholi interviews suggest three related issues foundational to the integration of the children born in LRA and social relations ruptured by the conflict in northern Uganda. First, familial/kinship ties are the most critical social ties these children have to establish for survival, security and protection. Joining communities becomes a play of social reciprocity with exchanges of support based on personalized familial/kinship, ultimately turning this social interaction into an integration asset; integration becomes a relational process in communities where systems of exchange and reciprocity exist. Second, lacking strong familial/kinship ties amounts to being "alone" or "a nobody" without anyone to draw on for support. Third, failure to establish social relations and maintain warm relationships is equivalent to failed integration.

---

[6]Interview 28: 26 years old, abducted at the age of 13 for 6 years, Omiya Anyima, Kitgum district, 8 November 2012.

[7]Interview 21: 24 years old, abducted at the age of 12 for 6 years, Omiya Anyima, Kitgum district, 4 November 2012.
[8]Interview 38: 26 years old, abducted at the age of 14 for 7 years, Lukung, Lamwo district, 5 February 2013.

Acholi families understood that children connecting with families, clans and broader community networks were crucial for acceptance, a determinant of meaningful integration. In many cases, families accepted and embraced the children, ultimately supporting their integration. However, I found that community members continued to prioritize stigmatization in their interaction with the children, which reinforced their ongoing victimhood and marginality as children and as community members. Three Acholi mothers expressed the dilemma facing their children in this way:

When we initially returned home, it was challenging to live with people. Every time I moved around the community with my child, people started saying, 'look at this rebel child. The rebels have finished [killed] people; this child should have been killed.' This mentality/perspective has not changed in the community.[9]

People like uttering words to the boy, especially when he becomes offensive. For instance, 1 day, his chicken disappeared and someone killed it. He revenged by beating his uncle's pig and almost destroying it. People in our community were alarmed, saying, 'the boy is very violent. He has taken the father's character.'[10]

The biggest challenge is the stigmatization directed toward us [with three children]. They [children] keep telling me how sad and stressed they feel. To cheer them up, I tell them how hurt I also feel and that if there was a way of returning to the bush, we would have, just to be free. The same things [stigmatization] are being said to them at schools as well. I have visited their schools to discuss with their teachers to protect them against stigmatization from their mates, but the problem persists. They are still being branded as rebels.[11]

These examples were characteristic of reports from many formerly abducted women in this research. As we might call them, the never abducted populations in the Acholi region view the children with suspicion and place them on the periphery of community life. Community stigmatization dominates their integration experiences, including off-putting thoughts, feelings, inappropriate language and actions intended to constitute defamation or slander. Mothers' accounts show that unusually close attention is paid to the children's actions, responses, and behavior, with aggressive/assertive/challenging outlook/attitude being highlighted and labeled as "violent"/"offensive" and contrary to local understanding of children and childhood. These actions and behaviors are considered alien and inferior to Acholi norms and standards.

Yet, accounts propose that integration is interactive and relational, emphasizing social relations with family, kinship, and other community members, with acceptance and trust as the primary indicators to regulate its success. However, the

prospect of achieving "true" community acceptance had not materialized for most children encountered in this study. Several years after joining receptor communities, they lived under close observation by family and community members. Difficulties associated with a lack of acceptance at the family/kinship or community level undermined integration. It was my experience that many children in the sample were accepted in the immediate family but still faced stigmatization in the broader community, which led to a general sense of failure and exclusion.

According to mothers' perspectives, meaningful integration involves transitioning from rebel identity to civilian children. The process is transformative and aims to connect them to structural and cognitive elements of society, which facilitates the establishment of positive familial/kinship ties and community networks. This long-term and dynamic process involves complex negotiations and exchanges between host communities and the children. Inclusion is the ultimate goal of integration. Thus, integration involves repairing relationships characterized by positive emotions, culminating in social acceptance and inclusion.

CULTURE, PATRIARCHY AND STIGMATIZATION

Three sources of this stigmatization emerge in the data. *Firstly*, being conceived and born in the bush. The formerly abducted mothers in the study used two geographical spaces, home and bush, to contrast their children's past and present experiences. During fieldwork, I also observed a difference between the understanding of the bush and home spaces in the context of Acholi. *Lum* refers to grass that builds to a bush. Acholi people use the concept of *Lum* to refer to the "bush"—denoting an unsafe, fearful, and mysterious place not to be visited without good reason. The bush is where wild animals, criminals, and polluting spirits reside. On the other hand, a home/community is a sanctioned space where people live in harmony under the guidance of ancestral *jogi*. Some studies have also utilized moral geography to explore this bush vs. the home binary in Acholi society (Oloya, 2013; Dubal, 2018; Porter, 2019; MacDonald and Kerali, 2020).

At the beginning of the LRA rebellion, the tension between bush and home spaces became louder. The rebellion did not take place in a social and spiritual vacuum. It was largely an Acholi rebellion led by a majority of Acholi fighters. The leadership was, therefore, no strangers to Acholi culture. However, Baines (2017) argues that in the late 1990s, Joseph Kony created a "new Acholi nation," which he considered morally superior to the old Acholi. According to her research participants, Kony termed the new state Acholi A and the old state Acholi B. Besides abductions of adolescents and teenagers, Kony relied on an institutionalized forced marriage to populate the new state (Apio, 2016; Baines, 2017). The new Acholi state project complemented the spiritual initiative project introduced at the group's formation in the late 1980s (see Behrend, 1999; Van Acker, 2004; Titeca, 2010). The LRA/new Acholi practiced their version of social harmony, just like home, upheld by a spiritual body *via* Kony (see Behrend,

---

[9]Interview 27: 25 years old, abducted at the age of 12 for 4 years, Omiya Anyima, Kitgum district, 23 November 2012.

[10]Interview 31: 31 years old, abducted at the age of 11 for 6 years, Kitgum town, Kitgum district, 19 November 2012.

[11]Interview 40: 26 years old, abducted at the age of 13 for 6 years, Lukung, Lamwo district, 10 February 2013.

1999; Van Acker, 2004). While their settlements in south Sudan and social life mirrored old Acholi, the rebellion developed their own moral codes that every member lived by Titeca (2010), Baines (2017), and Porter (2019). Interviews show that upon arrival in the LRA settlements, newly abducted persons were subjected to rituals to cleanse them of any potential polluting spirits and witchcraft from the old and inferior Acholi state. LRA/new Acholi social harmony transgressors were punished, sometimes by death (Titeca, 2010; Baines, 2017; Porter, 2019).

Similarly, at home, people coined the term *olumolum*—derived from *Lum*—to refer to people that had entered the bush to wage a rebellion against the Government. Over the years, the *olumolum* came to mean "people who live in the bush"—as in the case of the LRA rebels—suggesting they were polluted, mentally unsound, criminals, with a "bush mentality." Thus, returning from the rebellion and the bush, home communities perceived children parented by the LRA members and born in the bush as now possessing a lower moral status in a society where people, nature, and the spiritual world determine moral standing. The never-abducted persons saw them as potential polluters of the social body. Therefore, I found the bush an essential concept linked together with the LRA and the polluting spirits.

Having *olumolum* ("people of the bush"—LRA combatants and abductees) as their natal parents and being conceived in the bush is one of the main sources of stigma for LRA children in Acholi region. Being born in the bush "qualifies" them as *olumolum*. Indeed, I found that these children were described and referred to in conversations as *olumolum*, denoting they were also "people of the bush." Two mothers stated:

> My child faces severe stigmatization from the community. When referring to him, people use negative descriptions ranging from 'born in the bush' to 'rebel'. These descriptions affect our children and us.[12]

> I have not heard any forms of segregation toward my children in my family. However, some people in the outside community use a stigmatizing language. When referring to the children, they always use phrases like, 'children she returned with from the bush'. As their mother, I do not feel at ease when I hear such statements.[13]

Interviews suggest that these children in the Acholi area have two parallel worlds—the bush world and the "normal" world. Although they may have complete access to the normal world and live close to never abducted people, they are nevertheless conceptualized as inhabiting the unknown, polluted and feared bush world. And because of this background, they are singled out and labeled as different, strange, or even dangerous. They are "othered" and deemed as of lower status when others know their history. Many find themselves isolated from society and discredited by the unaccepting host communities. Mothers interviewed for this study reported that locals viewed their children through the prism of their birth in the bush. Their character is understood as "bush-like." They are teased, scorned, and stigmatized about this background.

Secondly, association with the rebellion. Beyond being born in the bush, interviews show that these children's association with the LRA rebellion is also a source of their stigmatization. Locals in Acholi communities call them "Kony," "Kony's children" or "rebels," claiming that they are "wild" and potentially future "criminals." Locals blame them for the hated practices of their fathers, assuming that they are "useless" like Kony and his militiamen, who are perceived as useless fathers that inflicted uncountable pain on their society and with no remorse. The boys are viewed as having inherited their fathers' wild and criminal behavior and are thus more commonly stereotyped as "criminals," "uncivilized" and "untamed," placing them outside the social harmony. As one mother put it, "I do not have any bad feelings toward my child because I am the mother. But other people stigmatize him a lot, saying his father is a rebel and that he will have no future use to the community."[14] Another shared this sad story: "I abandoned my marriage after only 8 months because I could not stand bad statements and treatment directed at my children and me. People used to say that if my boys grow up, with the bush mentality inherited from their father, they will break the man's [step father] home."[15] This interviewee's marital community perceived her children as a source of danger and fear. Locals feared them because rebel men fathered the children, with some believing the children inherited their fathers' characters and were prone to being violent in the stepfather's home and community.

Similarly, compared to their peers not born in the LRA, these children are viewed as more stubborn and uncontrollable, with girls understood to have inherited their mothers' perceived "weak points." Step-fathers, in particular, were reported to use insulting words like "stupid," "senseless," "bush mentality/behavior," or "unsound mind" in relation to them and their mothers. This language highlights the difference and distance between these children and the local population, reinforcing their exclusion from mainstream society. It underlines local awareness of their social origins. It shows how the children are seen as inferior or of lower status, posing a danger to the local social order and its accompanying harmony.

Thirdly, illegitimacy at birth. Backgrounds of being born in the bush and association with the rebellion are key sources of stigmatization in northern Uganda. However, I found that children born in the LRA face persistent stigmatization mainly due to the "illegitimacy" of their birth circumstances. Being born out of wedlock sees them negatively perceived and devalued, while having an unknown father makes this even worse.

Interviews show that patriarchy and patrilineality fundamentally influence these children's contested identities and citizenship in northern Uganda. Indeed, Acholi society is

---

[12]Interview 9: 31 years old, abducted at the age of 11 for 8 years, Amida, Kitgum district, 13 November 2012.

[13]Interview 29: 26 years old, abducted at the age of 13 for 7 years, Omiya Anyima, Kitgum district, 13 November 2012.

[14]Interview 9: 31 years old, abducted at the age of 11 for 8 years, Amida, Kitgum district, 13 November 2012. Interview, Mother 9, Amida, Kitgum district, October 2012.

[15]Interview 30: 26 years old, abducted at the age of 13 for 6 years, Kitgum town, Kitgum district. Omiya Anyima, Kitgum district, 8 November 2012.

organized along patriarchal, patrilineal, and interdependent clan lines. Paternal lineage membership determines access to social identity, belonging and status, ultimately deciding access to resources, particularly land. Families resist raising children that are not of their lineage/clan.

Nyom (marriage) plays a crucial role in unifying lineages/clans and ensuring social integration in Acholi culture (Finnström, 2008; Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014; Kiconco, 2021a). Customary marriages are completed with the payment of bridewealth, which cements the contract between the girl and boy's families/clans. When the groom's clan pays its *tongo keny* (bridewealth), the move establishes reproductive and productive rights in the woman's family. The married woman joins and becomes part of her husband's family/clan, while the children born of the union become part of their father's clan and lineage. Where the levied *tongo keny* has not been paid in full, the relationship is not recognized, any resultant children are viewed as illicit, and ultimately they belong to their mother's clan and lineage. This is such a socially undesirable outcome that a process exists, called "*luk pa latin*," whereby the paternal family pays a customary fine for the care taken to raise the child in order to affiliate it to its father's lineage. Although deeply affected by war, displacement, and the accompanying crises of social reproduction, these customs remain crucial to Acholi social order and, therefore, individual psychological wellbeing (Kiconco, 2021a).

When an LRA father pays *tongo keny* to the woman's family/clan, he can secure a sanctioned marriage. Similarly, he claims custodianship if he pays compensation to the mother's clan for the child. I will give an example to elaborate on this process and experience. Lamunu (pseudonym) was one of the two women in the sample that lived with their LRA husbands and children. Abducted at 14 for 10 years, Lamunu escaped the rebellion without informing her rebel husband and returned home with their three children. Some months later, the government forces captured and rescued the man. Upon homecoming, he traced Lamunu and the children to engage her clan in *tongo keny* (bridewealth) and *luk* (fines for the children). The move would officially seek Lamunu's hand in marriage and realign their children's lineage. Lamunu reported, "Our home communities are close to each other, so it was not difficult for him to trace us."[16]

Working with his clan elders, the husband negotiated and paid *lim akumu* for Lamunu and *luk* that Lamunu's clan levied on the man's clan for children that arose from the LRA forced marriage (locally considered illicit sex). Lamunu reported using the money he received as part of the DDR resettlement package to clear these fines and cultural expectations: "He received 250,000 Ugandan Shillings from Uganda Amnesty Commission to start life back home. He spent some of it to meet *lim akumu* and *luk* obligations."[17] I met Lamunu's family in 2013, 8 years after

returning home. They now had a fourth child, born out of legitimate marriage, and did not pay *luk*.

The facts highlighted in this story reveal that Lamunu and her husband saw marriage and kinship as reintegration strategies. They understood that an Acholi girl giving birth without being legally married runs contrary to Acholi custom and is perceived as a threat to the institution of marriage. Locals would view their children as products of practices that violated customary norms of sex, gender, kinship, marriage and patriarchy. Their presence in home communities would consequentially be interpreted as disrupting and threatening Acholi social order and social harmony. Therefore, they knowledgeably evoked and engaged with the social processes of *tongo keny* and *luk* to kick-start their reintegration into society. Lamunu and her husband saw engaging with these customs as a solid strategy to make their relationship acceptable in society, ultimately supporting their children's integration.

Indeed, the experience brought their clans into a social relationship in which they transferred their children's lineage affiliation from maternal to paternal family/clan. It was only after this process that the man could claim their children. They both understood that if they started living together without initiating and experiencing marriage and kinship customs to make their union official and pay child compensation, the move would further transgress social harmony (increase tensions) between the two clans. Thus, the action neutralized existing tensions induced by their bush experience, forced marriage and children born out of this relationship.

Interviews suggest that the never-abducted men who marry formerly abducted women and wish to take on custodianship of their LRA children can also evoke the *luk* custom. Indeed, "Akello (pseudonym) stays with me here [marital home]. Initially, she was with my relatives. But when I shared about her with my husband, he agreed to pay *luk* to my relative who was taking care of her and brought her home here. She is with us, and he decided to take care of her and support her education." Similarly, "I pray that my husband will continue to accept and support my children. Because this is the only place they know and call home. Even in future, it will be their only home. All my plans depend on what we agree on with my husband. If he remains peaceful and agrees to my hopes of fathering them [paying *luk*], I will be very relieved."[18]

During fieldwork, this stringent cultural process of child affiliation was prevalent in Acholi society. Another woman revealed that she escaped with two children, leaving their father in the LRA. His family wanted to take the children from the maternal clan illegally (without paying *luk*). However, her family involved the police in blocking the move: "I came back from the bush with two children. But the [LRA] man's family tried stealing one child, but we were quick to report this to police, and they stopped them."[19]

---

[16]Interview 15: 31 years old, abducted at the age of 13 for 7 years, Amida, Kitgum district, 13 November 2012.

[17]Interview 58: 36 years old, abducted at the age of 12 for 10 years, Gulu town, 6 February 2013.

[18]Interview 36: 27 years old, abducted at the age of 12 for 7 years, Lukung, Lamwo district, 7 January 2013.

[19]Interview 24: 32 years old, abducted at the age of 12 for 6 years, Omiya nyima, Kitgum district, 17 November 2012.

In this research, fewer children with established paternal ties stood in contrast with the experiences of most children with no paternal links and relations. These children in the sample struggled to cope with unknown paternal identities. Mothers expressed concerns as asked whether they worried about their children growing up not knowing their birth fathers. Three women reflected on the events:

> He used to come and stay with us [marital home] some time ago. He came here to ask for educational materials, books, pens and school uniforms. But when my husband began abusing and calling him 'rebel child' and persisted after I had asked him to cease, the boy decided on his own to stop coming here.[20]

> I worry about the future of my son. Commonly, boys will grow up and look for their paternal homes, even when you deny them information about their homes. Even for Okello, I hope that if people continue to stigmatize and tell him about his roots, perhaps he might get interested in tracing his paternal home.[21]

> People stigmatize and talk about it [fatherhood] to him. That makes me angry and anxious. I constantly worry that this issue will be a big concern when he grows older. If he were a girl, at least it would have been better. I had wanted to tell him that his father died, but he is still too young to understand. For now, he calls my elder brother his father.[22]

These examples suggest that when children grow older and develop a sense of self and a need for social acceptance and belonging, they might become sensitive to stigmatization and emotional abuse from the community. They will reinvent themselves as they enter teenage years and adulthood, asking questions about their paternal roots and origins and seeking true meaningful identity.

While it appears as though the most pervasive stigmatization is similar for boys and girls, some perspectives suggest a gendered element in the experience and realities. Indeed, "If he were a girl, at least it would have been better."[23] The Acholi experience proposes that gender plays a role in how integration evolves in northern Uganda, particularly in the long term. Some mothers felt that male children faced a severe predicament because they could not survive outside maternal clans. They were bound to be rejected, marginalized and stigmatized for the rest of their lives. On the other hand, mothers felt marriage offered a solid path to leave the maternal clan and enter a new clan (husband's clan), where they could access land and other resources (Kiconco, 2021b). They would eventually escape rejection and stigmatization from maternal clan members.

Consultations show that for Acholi children, knowing and belonging to their paternal family/clan is critical in their social belonging, protection, and provision. By contrast, children with no paternal lineage are viewed as lower status and treated accordingly. Unfortunately, this necessarily applies to most children fathered by the LRA men, whose fathers never paid *tongo keny* and are largely absent from their children's lives. These children typically exist as social others who are illegitimate within the Acholi order of things and social harmony. So much so that some mothers reported being criticized for exiting the LRA with their children. In the words of one, "my relatives bluntly told me that I should have left the child with the LRA since the father was not around [still with rebels] to take care of the child, so coming home with the child was useless. That, moreover, this would only bring more problems for my return home. This hurt me a lot."[24] Similarly, "I am constantly told that I should not bother raising a child of no father."[25]

"As a mother, you cannot stay with a child who does not know their father or paternal home. The child needs to know their father's home."[26] As Lamunus's case shows, it is socially possible for the LRA father or his family/clan to claim custodianship of a child through *luk* negotiations. However, this has rarely been pursued by families, clans, and child protection institutions, largely because doing so may be challenging and require comprehensive coordination among families, clans, and the wider community. Recent experience shows mothers most often initiate child tracing after children request to learn their paternal identity. Some children themselves initiate other cases. A smaller number of cases are initiated by LRA returned fathers or by the paternal clan (see, e.g., Baines and Oliveira, 2020; Tinashe et al., 2020). As such, in the present sample, only 11 children knew their paternal families at the time of fieldwork.[27] This suggests that most children in the sample attempted to integrate into their maternal clan systems, unable to rely on their paternal kinship networks for support.

Acholi experience shows that knowing and connecting with paternal kin expands integration space for these children in northern Uganda. At the very least, this would address their inability to access the most crucial resource, land. In the Acholi region, the land is customarily owned, with male children expected to inherit it from their fathers to establish their own families and farming livelihoods. Having no relationship with their biological fathers, these children lack inheritance rights and claims to land. This leaves them vulnerable and at the mercy of their maternal kin and stepfathers, which is necessarily uncertain

---

[20]Interview 25: 28 years old, abducted at the age of 12 for 10 years, Omiya nyima, Kitgum district, 20 November 2012.

[21]Interview 3: 28 years old, abducted at the age of 10 for eight 10 years, Amida, Kitgum district, 6 November 2012.

[22]Interview 25: 28 years old, abducted at the age of 12 for 10 years, Omiya nyima, Kitgum district, 20 November 2012.

[23]Interview 25: 28 years old, abducted at the age of 12 for 10 years, Omiya nyima, Kitgum district, 20 November 2012.

---

[24]Interview 12: 23 years old, abducted at the age of 12 for 6 years, Kitgum town, Kitgum District, 5 November 2012.

[25]Interview 9: 31 years old, abducted at the age of 11 for 8 years, Amida, Kitgum district, 13 November 2012.

[26]Interview 39: 35 years old, abducted at the age of 11 for 7 years, Gulu town, 9 February 2012.

[27]Six lived with their mothers and fathers after the two mothers had exited the LRA and been joined by the LRA fathers, who paid the customary bridewealth for the mothers and the *luk* for each of the children. Two other children had joined their fathers. One belonged to a mother who returned with two children by the same LRA father, but the father took only one after paying *luk*. The mother was in a new relationship. The second child lived with the maternal grandparents because the father was yet to pay the second *luk*. Two final stayed with their mothers, but their fathers often visited. One mother exited the LRA with three children by two combatants: his paternal family (grandparents) had taken one, and the other two lived with maternal grandparents, with no knowledge of their paternal family.

given the stigma they face due to their socially unorthodox. Consider these two experiences:

> I plan to have a place for my children and me to call home. Even if we are living at my aunt's home, in the future, as human beings, people will get tired of my children and expect them to find their places. I have to plan for them before they become adults by finding a piece of land and constructing a house. If I find a Good Samaritan to rent their land, we can grow some food.[28]

> My marital home is experiencing land issues involving the children I returned with from the bush. What will happen if they continue to reject and deny them access to land? I do not have any power to avoid that. I am only waiting to see what the future has in store for them. I do not have anyone to help me look after them. Where will I put them? Will they find help when the LRA has been fully demolished?[29]

Reuniting with their paternal families does not mean these children are guaranteed the safety of belonging and land accessibility. Indeed, they will still have to maneuver amidst the land wrangles engulfing most of the Acholi region (Joireman, 2018). But paternal lineage networks will at least offer them the basis of the safety net that most vulnerable children in Uganda rely on to survive.

INTERVENTION, DE-CENTRING CHILDREN AND EXACERBATION OF INTEGRATION COMPLEXITIES

How to ensure reintegration for girls abducted and forced into marriages? How to integrate the children born of their unions, with or without their fathers? These are the questions faced by many organizations working in northern Uganda during and after the war. Unfortunately, my data show that there are several problems plaguing what they do. This section shows that rehabilitation and reintegration agencies failed to mitigate the Acholi above socio-cultural issues. At times, the biases within their approaches even made things worse.

The first issue with the mainstream approach to protection and reintegration concerns the conception of childhood predominant within intervening agencies. Consultations show that neither childhood nor adulthood is reducible to biological age in the Acholi region. Adolescence is considered the phase between the ages of 10 and 18. *Orobo* ("youth"/"young-persons") are people between the ages of 15 and 30. But particularly in rural areas, a girl becomes a woman upon experiencing menstrual cycles, developing breasts, or being sexually active. Therefore, girls between 12 and 16 are typically seen as ready for marriage and bearing children. A girl becomes a woman *as soon as* she marries or gets pregnant, even if this occurs at age 12 or 13. Therefore, though still young in biological age, a pregnant girl will begin self-identifying as *Dako matidi* ("young

mother/woman/wife"). Thus, marriage and motherhood—not age—are the pathways to womanhood and adulthood in this context (p'Bitek, 1986; Dolan, 2005: 282; Finnström, 2008: 235).

By contrast, for rehabilitation agencies, children and childhood are biological phenomena, and each implies an inability to consent to sexual activity or resulting pregnancy. As such, agencies constructed all females returning from LRA captivity as "child mothers." Reports show that "the majority of those classified as 'child mothers' at reception centers [were] over the age of 18" (Allen and Schomerus, 2006: 24), so they were adults in both the Western and Acholi sense of that term. Yet agencies aimed at reproducing "children" in line with Western standards—innocent, helpless, vulnerable, dependent, in need of rescue, etc.—no doubt in part because this is what played with donor sympathies. However, agencies treated these young women as children: "they [staff] cared for us but treated us as children even when some of us already had children."[30] This limited the cultural appropriateness of agency interventions and ultimately alienated many.

Furthermore, the focus on "mothers-as-children" meant that their children were de-centered in the design and implementation of programmes, limiting the quality of their support. Yet, children's suffering has implications for mothers' reintegration. The interviews suggest that mothers cannot fully reintegrate if their children do not experience meaningful integration. Indeed, "the stigmatization of our children greatly affects us because we did not choose to be abducted and give birth to them with the rebels. It was not our wish, and the negative treatment from the community give us [mothers] much pain."[31]

Therefore, in the initial days, more needed to be done to change attitudes in northern Uganda that viewed these children as "other," resultantly keeping them at the periphery of mainstream society. As I examined the integration process in the Acholi region, I asked whether child protection agencies that sought to help and support mothers did more harm than good in terms of their children. I recognize that mothers experienced more vulnerabilities and needs when they initially left the LRA. However, infantilizing and turning them into a focus of concern complicated their home status, position and situation. Notably, the move invisibilised their children. So, in developing this argument in this section, I am not unjustly criticizing child protection agencies nor trivializing the challenges they faced trying to return these mothers to their home communities. Rather, the objective is to demonstrate that infantilizing mothers/women were counterproductive to their children's integration.

Experiences of stigmatization reveal that international institutions overlooked or ignored the purported social disorder associated with being born in the bush/rebellion and its influence on integration. Critical aspects of social disharmony related to these children's status and background were not acknowledged and appropriately addressed. Failure to consider

---

[28]Interview 32: 31 years old, abducted at the age of 11 for 8 years, Kitgum town, 14 November 2012.
[29]Interview 13: 31 years old, abducted at the age of 11 for 9 years, Amida, Kitgum district, 13 November 2012.

[30]Interview 18: 21 years old, abducted at the age of 13 for 8 years, Amida, Kitgum district, 13 October 2012.
[31]Interview 9: 31 years old, abducted at the age of 11 for 8 years, Amida, Kitgum district, 13 November 2012.

such concerns also meant overlooking broader cultural norms, gender ideologies and patriarchal tendencies, signifying that international institutions approached children's experiences as taking place in a vacuum. Yet, the integration processes evolved in social and cultural frameworks affected and changed by the protracted war. Accordingly, institutions needed to pay close attention to local culture, patriarchy and gender constructions and their shaping of daily lives to make sense of how integration would evolve and affect the children.

Beyond such primary difficulties, the exceptionalism inherent to the targeted focus on returning "child mothers" contributed to their children's stigmatization. This happened for a number of reasons. First, the preference for the initial phase of integration taking place in centers run by foreign agencies as opposed to within community settings gave the impression to many communities that they were seen as unable to offer appropriate support to these children. This bred resentment among many locals, worsened by how reintegration agencies advocated for mothers and children, voicing their concerns to criticize the public for not protecting them. The Western approach to childhood and womanhood highlighted alienated people through its implicit disregard for local understandings. At the same time, the sole focus on child mothers and their children vexed people by ignoring the parallels between their difficulties and those of the wider region. In Allen and Schomerus' words, "so many adolescent girls in northern Uganda [were] living vulnerable and impoverished lives, and [were] likely to end up becoming pregnant at a very early age" (2006: 24). Provision of support and opportunities in a manner that did not address the needs of these other vulnerable populations, therefore, made returnee mothers and children stand out in a way that entrenched resentment against them, thus exclusion from mainstream society.[32]

Agencies pursued the "child mother" policy for legal reasons and moral reasons of responsibility and accountability. But in their attempt to restore "lost childhoods," they prioritized returning women who were now mothers to the communities they left before they became mothers. The move de-centered their children, consequentially keeping them invisible and condemning them to a lower status. This flew in the face of the local customs outlined above and overlooked the reality that their mothers' families and communities would not automatically accept some children. Consequently, both children and their returning mothers faced stigma, preventing meaningful (re)integration.

The unintended experience of de-centring children seemed to have influenced many mothers against tracing fathers or paternal families upon homecoming. I found that the identity of their children's father was not an issue for some mothers in the sample, a perspective they seemed to have adopted from organizations. Protection agencies sometimes discouraged continuing relationships with LRA combatants or tracing paternal families in the early days of return. Consider this experience:

I did not attempt to do anything like that [tracing for paternal family] because we were advised by [rehabilitation agency] that there was no need to do that since we suffered in the bush carrying and delivering them [children]. They were our consolations and blessings that God had given us and that we should never let their fathers' relatives know. Even about the mere fact that the children were related to them and had come back home with us.[33]

Following the Acholi naming custom, male LRA combatants named their children after themselves or their families/clans. Male children were named after their fathers' brothers or uncles and some girls after their paternal grandmothers. It is possible that this was viewed as a way of eventually identifying the child in the future. Indeed, had the father's family members wanted to trace the child, these names would have been crucial. As such, agencies advised mothers to rename their children. Some agencies even went as far as to interfere with details that could have helped fathers or their lineages identify and trace their children. In some cases, agencies came up with new names themselves:

While in captivity, he was named Binaisa Samuel Arwai [a pseudonym] after his father, Arwai. But when we were at [agency], the name Arwai was deleted from his name. The management advised me that the name Arwai would make people stigmatize him in the village. So I decided to stop calling him Arwai.[34]

Since they acted as the critical broker reintroducing returnees to civil society and preparing them for community-based reintegration, agencies held a hierarchal position in northern Uganda. Besides offering support, there was an opportunity to advocate for these children's social visibility and customary rights pertaining to paternal descent and in line with local custom. Instead, they sponsored interventions that contributed to the predicament around identity and social belonging facing these children.

Although paternal family/clan reunions may help with reconciliation and redress, northern Uganda has not focused on this. The focus and target of reintegration agencies and programmes remain to return and keep LRA combatants in their home communities. In addition, the emphasis on mothers continues to drive the reintegration intervention. This is done with the perception that "empowering" mothers will improve the wellbeing of their children. But, this approach leaves many gaps. Many mothers stipulate the desire re-marry with non-LRA men, leaving their children with maternal grandparents or/and relatives (Kiconco, 2021a). Some mothers do not have immediate relations alive or willing to take on their children. With these children unable to join their mothers in new marriages/relationships, they are left at the mercy of extended relatives or stranded with well-wishers.

The article should not suggest that all formerly abducted women desire to reunite with their LRA husbands or their families and clans. In fact, some women in the sample resented

---

[32]There were some efforts to incorporate both formerly abducted mothers and other war-affected young mothers in the same communities in research and rehabilitation projects (see for example SWAY, 2006; McKay et al., 2010).

[33]Interview 25: 28 years old, abducted at the age of 12 for 10 years, Omiya nyima, Kitgum district, 20 November 2012.

[34]Interview 16: 26 years old, abducted at the age of 11 for 8 years, Omiya nyima, Kitgum district, 15 November 2012.

the LRA men/husbands because their union was an experience of rape, forced marriage and forced pregnancy, which they saw as having ended with their return home. Many were in new relationships with never-abducted men. The forced marriage trauma continued to inform these women's perspectives on their children born in the LRA and their integration back home. Many saw raising the children by themselves or with the help of maternal clans as a superior strategy compared to tracing for their fathers or paternal kin.

Similarly, I do not wish to suggest that it is compulsory for children fathered by the LRA fathers to know their paternal families to integrate into northern Uganda communities. However, we assume this is likely from what has been explained above about the Acholi social order. Furthermore, from a fundamental material standpoint, mothers facing severe impoverishment need the support they could receive from biological fathers and paternal relatives to integrate their children meaningfully. Thus, "If Dominic [Ongwen] would come back, he and I could join hands and raise our two children," stated one of Ongwen's former forced wives who appeals for his forgiveness. Indeed, confronting though it may be to some, she pleaded for reconciliation and not the prosecution of such LRA fathers.[35]

CONCLUSION

In this article, I interpret integration in northern Uganda as fundamentally a social process that features dynamic interactions between the children born in the LRA captivity and host communities. The ultimate goal is to establish and maintain social and kinship relationships to support life post-LRA. It is not something that children can do on their own, as integration involves the negotiation of social identities and the configuration of social status and positions. The key issue that shapes integration is whether these children can establish and maintain decent relationships with kin and host communities, resulting in social inclusion. I arrived at this interpretation by attending to children and their lived experiences and realities of integration told *via* interviews with their formerly abducted mothers. It was my experience that mothers understand their children's integration challenges, particularly their lack of a paternal identity, which influence their access to resources, particularly the land with clan affiliation.

A key objective of my study was to examine the significant sources of stigmatization among the children born in the LRA as they attempt to integrate into northern Uganda communities.

Their backgrounds of being born in the bush, association with the LRA and illegitimacy at birth emerged as the key sources of their stigmatization. Everyday stigmatization mediates integration experiences among the LRA captivity children in the Acholi region. Stigmatization is a challenge that consistently undercuts their aspirations for recovery and integration. Stigmatization takes different forms and serves multiple functions. The exclusion and alienation of the children by the never-abducted population constitute perhaps the single most difficult hindrance to meaningful integration. Stigmatization arising from culture and patriarchy adversely affect opportunities for developing and nurturing meaningful social relationships. Social participation is severely compromised, reducing hope and prospects significantly among these children. The factors leading to their stigmatization are unique, as they challenge the common belief that integration is a critical, necessary and durable post-conflict solution.

Social orders can have paradoxical effects, providing an environment that protects sections of a community while isolating others. In their daily experiences, the LRA children in this research contended with negative stereotypes and prejudices that extended to their attempts to form essential and useful networks with the never-abducted population that could benefit them. From their experience, it would seem that significant and productive integration for this category of children in northern Uganda is a challenging prospect. Their experience proposes that the cultural environment is not always entirely conducive to successful integration for children born in rebel groups. Stigmatization heavily rooted in the collective culture can steadily push them further away and into the margins of society.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to the corresponding author.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by University of Birmingham. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

---

[35]An interview with Mail & Guardian. Retrieved from: https://mg.co.za/article/2015-02-16-uganda-the-thin-line-between-victim-and-perpetrator.

REFERENCES

Aijazi, O., and Baines, E. (2017). Relationality, culpability and consent in wartime: men's experiences of forced marriage. *Int. J. Transitional Justice* 11, 463–483. doi: 10.1093/ijtj/ijx023

Allen, T. (2005). *Trial Justice: The International Criminal Court and the Lord's Resistance Army*. London: Zed Books.

Allen, T., and Schomerus, M. (2006). *A Hard Homecoming: Lessons Learned from the Reception Center Process on Effective Interventions for Former "Abductees" in Northern Uganda*. Kampala: USAID and UNICEF. Available online at: http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADI 241.pdf

Annan, J., Blattman, C., Carlson, K., and Mazurana, D. (2008). *The State of Female Youth in Northern Uganda: Findings From the Survey of War Affected Youth,*

(SWAY), Phase II. Boston: Feinstein International Center, Tufts University. Available online at: http://hdl.handle.net/10427/71115

Apio, E. O. (2016). *Children born of war in northern Uganda: kinship, marriage, and the politics of post-conflict reintegration in Lango society* (PhD. Dissertation). The University of Birmingham. Available online at: http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/6926/

Atim, T., Mazurana, D., and Marshak, A. (2018). Women survivors and their children born of wartime sexual violence in Northern Uganda. *Disasters* 42, S61–S78. doi: 10.1111/disa.12275

Atkinson, R. R. (1994). *The Roots of Ethnicity: The Origins of the Acholi of Uganda Before 1800*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Baines, E. (2009). Complex Political Perpetrators: Reflections on Dominic Ongwen. *Journal of Modern Afr. Stud.* 47, 163–191. doi: 10.1017/S0022278X09003796

Baines, E. (2017). *Buried in the Heart: Women, Complex Victimhood and the War in Northern Uganda*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Baines, E., and Oliveira, C. (2020). Securing the future: transformative justice and children 'born of war'. *Soc. Legal Stud.* 30, 341–361. doi: 10.1177/0964663920946430

Baines, E., and Rosenoff-Gauvin, L. (2014). Motherhood and social repair after war and displacement in northern Uganda. *J. Refug. Stud.* 27, 282–300. doi: 10.1093/jrs/feu001

Behrend, H. (1999). *Alice Lakwena & the Holy Spirits: War in Northern Uganda, 1985-1997*. Oxford: James Currey.

Blattman, C., and Annan, J. (2010). "On the nature and causes of LRA Abduction: what the abductees say," in *The Lord's Resistance Army, Myth and Reality*, eds T. Allen and K. Vlassenroot (London: Zed Books), 132–155.

Branch, A. (2011). *Displacing Human Rights: War and Intervention in Northern Uganda*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Carlson, K., and Mazurana, D. (2008). *Forced Marriage Within the Lord's Resistance Army, Uganda*. Boston: Feinstein International Centre; Tufts University.

Carpenter, R. C. (ed.). (2010a). *Born of War: Protecting Children of Sexual Violence Survivors in Conflict Zones*. Boulder, CO: Kumarian Press.

Carpenter, R. C. (2010b). *Forgetting Children Born of War: Setting the Human Rights Agenda in Bosnia and Beyond*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Coulter, C. (2009). *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers: Women's Lives Through War and Peace in Sierra Leone*. Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press.

Creswell, J. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Crocker, J., Major, B., and Steele, C. (1998). "2Social stigma," in *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, Vol. 2, eds D. T. Gilbert and S. T. Fiske (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill), 504–553.

Cumming, J., and Cumming, E. (1965). On the stigma of mental illness. *Commun. Mental Health J.* 1, 135–143. doi: 10.1007/BF01435202

Denov, M. (2015). Children born of wartime rape: the intergenerational realities of sexual violence and abuse. *Ethics Med. Public Health* 1, 61–68. doi: 10.1016/j.jemep.2015.02.001

Denov, M., Anaïs, C., Vliet, V., Atim, A., and Arach, J. (2019). *Complex Perpetrators: Forced Marriage, Family, and Fatherhood in the Lord's Resistance Army*. Dosier: Masculinidades y feminidades en conflicto en el ámbito bélico-militar.

Denov, M., Green, A., Lakor, A. A., and Arach, J. (2018). Mothering in the aftermath of forced marriage and wartime rape: the complexities of motherhood in postwar Uganda. *J. Motherhood Initiative* 9, 158–176. Available online at: www.yorku.ca

Denov, M., and Lakor, A. A. (2017). When war is better than peace: the post-conflict realities of children born of wartime rape in northern Uganda. *Child Abuse Neglect* 65, 255–265. doi: 10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.02.014

Denov, M., and Lakor, A. A. (2018). Post-war stigma, violence and 'kony children': the responsibility to protect children born in lord's resistance army captivity in Northern Uganda. *Glob. Responsib. Prot.* 10, 217–238. doi: 10.1163/1875984X-01001011

Denov, M., and Piolanti, A. (2020). Identity formation and change in children and youth born of wartime sexual violence in northern Uganda. *J. Youth Stud.* 24, 1–13. doi: 10.1080/13676261.2020.1801994

Di Eugenio, A. R., and Baines, E. (2021). 'Our place under the sun': survivor centred approaches to children born of wartime sexual

violence. *Human Rights Rev.* 22, 1–21. doi: 10.1007/s12142-021-0 0631-3

Dijker, A. J. M., and Koomen, W. (2007). *Stigmatisation, Tolerance and Repair: An Integrative Psychological Analysis of Responses to Deviance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dolan, C. (2009). *Social Torture: The Case of Northern Uganda, 1986-2006*. New York, NY: Berghahn Books.

Dolan, C. G. (2005). *Understanding war and its continuation: The case of Northern Uganda, 1986-2004 (PhD Thesis)*. London School of Economics, London. Retrieved from: http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/832/

Dubal, S. (2018). *Against Humanity: Lessons from the Lord's Resistance Army*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

English, R. W. (1971). Correlates of stigma towards physically disabled persons. *Rehabil. Res. Prac. Rev.* 2, 1–17.

Eramian, L., and Denov, M. (2018). Is it always good to talk? The paradoxes of truth telling by rwandan youth born of rape committed during the genocide. *J. Genocide Res.* 20, 372–391. doi: 10.1080/14623528.2018.1459240

Finnström, S. (2008). *Living with Bad Surroundings. War, History, and Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda*. London: Duke University.

Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Inc.

Goodhart, M. (2007). Sins of the fathers: war rape, wrongful procreation, and children's human rights. *J. Human Rights* 6, 307–324. doi: 10.1080/14754830701334657

Hamel, M. (2016). Ethnic belonging of the children born out of rape in Post-Conflict Bosnia Herzegovina And Rwanda: ethnic belonging of the children born out of rape. *Nations Nationalism* 22, 287–304. doi: 10.1111/nana.12151

IDDRS (2006). *Integrated Disarmament Demobilisation and Disarmament Standard: National Institutions for DDR*. Available online at: www.unddr.org/the-iddrs

Joireman, S. (2018). Intergenerational land conflict in northern Uganda: children, customary law and return migration. *Africa* 88, 81–98. doi: 10.1017/S0001972017000559

Kiconco, A. (2021a). *Gender, Conflict and Reintegration in Uganda: Abducted Girls, Returning Women*. London: Routledge.

Kiconco, A. (2021b). "An African comparison: girl soldiers returning from a rebel group in Northern Uganda," in *Ex-Combatants' Voices*, Palgrave Studies in Compromise After Conflict, eds J. D. Brewer and A. Wahidin (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan), 237–262.

Kiconco, A., and Nthakomwa, A. (2018). Marriage for the 'new woman' from the lord's resistance army: experiences of female ex-abductees in Acholi region of Uganda. *Women's Stud. Int. Forum* 68, 65–74. doi: 10.1016/j.wsif.2018.02.008

Kiconco, A., and Nthakomwa, M. (2021). Wartime captivity and homecoming: culture, stigma and coping strategies of formerly abducted women in post-conflict Northern Uganda. *Disasters*. 1–23. doi: 10.1111/disa.12505

Ladisch, V. (2015). *From Rejection to Redress: Overcoming Legacies of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Northern Uganda*. Available online at: https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-Report-Uganda-Children-2015.pdf

Lee, S. (2017). *Children Born of War in the Twentieth Century*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Link, B. G., and Phelan, J. C. (2001). Conceptualising stigma. *Annu. Rev. Sociol.* 27, 363–385. doi: 10.1146/annurev.soc.27.1.363

MacDonald, A., and Kerali, R. (2020). Being normal: stigmatisation of lord's resistance army returnees as 'moral experience' in post-war Northern Uganda. *J. Refugee Stud.* 33, fez117. doi: 10.1093/jrs/fez117

McKay, S., and Mazurana, D. (2004). *Where are the Girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After War*. Montreal, QC: Rights & Democracy.

McKay, S., Veale, A., Worthen, M., and Wessells, M. (2010). *Community-Based Reintegration of War-Affected Young Mothers: Participatory Action Research (PAR) in Liberia, Sierra Leone & Northern Uganda*. Avaialble online at: www.pargirlmothers.com

Mukangendo, M. C. (2007). "Caring for children born of rape in Rwanda," in *Born of War: Protecting Children of Sexual Violence Survivors in Conflict Zones*, ed C. R. Carpenter (Sterling, VA: Kumarian), 40–52.

Neenan, J. (2017). *Closing the Protection Gap for Children Born of War - Addressing Stigmatisation and the Intergenerational Impact of Sexual Violence in Conflict.*

LSE & FCO. Available online at: http://www.lse.ac.uk/women-peace-security/assets/documents/2018/LSE-WPS-Children-Born-ofWar.pdf

Ofumbi, D. W. (2012). *Identity and Transformation: The Significance of African Christianity in Community Transformation*. New York, NY: Xulon Press.

Ojok, B. (2021). *Education after conflict: An examination of schooling policies, attitudes and responses to children born of war following their (re-)integration into the post-conflict settings of Northern Uganda* (PhD Dissertation). University of Birmingham, Birmingham, England.

Oliveira, C., and Baines, E. (2020). Children 'born of war': a role for fathers? *Int. Aff.* 96, 439–455.

Oloya, O. (2013). *Child to Soldier: Stories from Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Opiyo, L. M. (2015). *Alone Like a Tree: Reintegration Challenges Facing Children Born of War and Their Mothers in Northern Uganda*. Published by the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP), Gulu, Uganda.

Paris Principles (2007). *The Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated With Armed Forces or Armed Groups*. Geneva: United Nations.

p'Bitek, O. (1986). *Artist the Ruler: Essays on Art, Culture and Values*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.

Pescosolido, B. A., and Martin, L. K. (2015). The stigma complex. *Annu. Rev. Sociol.* 41, 87–116. doi: 10.1146/annurev-soc-071312-145702

Pham, N. P., Vinck, P., and Stover, E. (2007). *Abduction: The Lord's Resistance Army and Forced Conscription in Northern Uganda*. Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Human Rights Centre and Tulane University Centre for International Development, University of California.

Porter, H. (2017). *After Rape. Violence, Justice, and Social Harmony in Uganda*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Porter, H. (2019). Moral spaces and sexual transgression: understanding rape in war and post conflict. *Dev. Change* 50, 1009–1032. doi: 10.1111/dech.12499

Schulz, P. (2018). Displaced from gendered personhood: sexual violence and masculinities in northern Uganda. *Int. Affairs* 94, 1101–1120. doi: 10.1093/ia/iiy146

Seto, D. (2016). *No Place for a War Baby: The Global Politics of Children Born of Wartime*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Shanahan, F., and Veale, A. (2016). How mothers mediate the social integration of their children conceived of forced marriage within the Lord's Resistance Army. *Child Abuse Negl.* 51, 72–86. doi: 10.1016/j.chiabu.2015.11.003

Stewart, B. (2015). *We Are All the Same: Experiences of Children Born Into LRA Captivity*. Gulu: Justice and Reconciliation Project.

Stewart, B. W. (2017). *'I feel out of place': children born into the lord's resistance army and the politics of belonging* (PhD dissertation). University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada.

Stewart, B. W. (2020). Place-making and the everyday lives of children born into the Lord's Resistance Army. *Children's Geogr.* 19, 113–126. doi: 10.1080/14733285.2020.1713994

SWAY (2006). *Survey of War Affected Youth: Research and Programs for Youth in Armed Conflict in Uganda*. Research Briefs. Available online at: www.sway-uganda.org

Theidon, K. (2015). Hidden in plain sight children born of wartime sexual violence. *Curr. Anthropol.* 56, 158–172. doi: 10.1086/683301

Tinashe, B., Mutsonziwa, C., Anyeko, K., and Baines, E. (2020). Child tracing: locating the paternal homes of "children born of war." *Dev. Pract.* 30, 635–644. doi: 10.1080/09614524.2020.1743234

Titeca, K. (2010). "The spiritual order of the LRA in the Lord's Resistance Army," in *The Lord's Resistance Army: Myth and Reality*, eds T. Allen and K. Vlassenroot (London: Zed Books), 59–73.

UNICEF (2009). *Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review: Children and Conflict in a Changing World*. New York, NY: Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in Collaboration.

Van Acker, F. (2004). Uganda and the Lord's resistance army: the new order no one ordered. *African Affairs* 103, 335–357. doi: 10.1093/afraf/adh044

Veale, A., McKay, S., Worthen, M., and Wessells, M. (2013). "Children of young mothers formerly associated with armed forces or groups in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Northern Uganda," in *Early Childhoods in the Global South: Local and International Contexts*, eds J. O'Riordan, D. Horgan, and S. Martin (Oxford: Peter Lang), 27–48.

Watson, A. M. S. (2007). Children born of wartime rape: rights and representations. *Int. Feminist J. Politics* 9, 20–34. doi: 10.1080/14616740601066242