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Gabriele Rosenthal

Child Soldiers in Context

Biographies, Familial and Collective Trajectories
in Northern Uganda

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"Göttinger Beiträge zur soziologischen Biographieforschung/Göttingen Series in Sociological Biographical Research"

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Foreword by the editors

In recent years, methods in biographical research that are anchored in social constructivism and the sociology of knowledge have become established in the Center of Methods in Social Sciences at Georg-August University, Göttingen. In this context, a large amount of innovative and empirically sound research on a great variety of topics has been carried out. This new series is intended to do justice to this development. The editors wish to offer a forum for studies in the field of sociology written in German or English, whether doctoral dissertations, research reports or scholarly articles, which are based on the methodologies developed at the Center of Methods in Social Sciences. The studies published in the series shall include research works focused on methods and methodological developments as well as on material topics.

Maria Pohn-Lauggas, Gabriele Rosenthal, Nicole Witte, Arne Worm

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Foreword

Dieter Neubert

In the context of Africa, conflict studies constantly sees itself confronted with so-called asymmetric or decentralized conflicts that involve not only organized armies, but also rebel groups, militias, warlords, and other semi-formalized combat units. Forced recruitment by the latter is a widespread phenomenon, most often through the abduction of minors as "child soldiers". This affects both boys and girls, who may assume different roles with the combat units. Different groups may be active in the same region, and members of the rebel units can change their status more than once, from civilians to combatants and back again. And people who have been forcibly recruited are victims and perpetrators simultaneously. The term "civil war" is inadequate to describe these conflicts. They take place within a country – or several countries – and are often aimed at toppling a government, as in a civil war, but the categories of "friend" and "foe" are blurred. The victims are mainly civilians who are the target of attacks by both "rebels" (here an umbrella term for all non-government units, regardless of their concrete goals) and government troops. The "rebels" are often active in their home region, which they claim needs to be "liberated" by them, and are just as likely as the government troops to attack civilians. The latter often identify themselves with the "rebels", despite these attacks. Frequently, the methods of fighting are far from complying with the provisions of the Geneva Convention and result in many acts of violence that can be regarded as war crimes, committed by uncontrolled individuals or small groups of combatants, often as part of a deliberate strategy of demoralization and intimidation.

In view of these blurred lines of conflict, the usual diplomatic peace agreements do not always achieve the desired result. If one party to the conflict does not succeed in defeating or driving out the other(s), and thus in establishing peace by force, complicated negotiations on various levels are often necessary, involving both local and national, and often also international, actors (Lederach 1995). When the fighting ends, for whatever reason, whether with the victory of one party, peace negotiations, exhaustion of the combat units, or various combinations of these, the question arises of how to deal with the combatants and the acts of violence or war crimes they have committed. Even here, there is a relation of tension between the attempt to persuade the warring parties to end the violence and the justifiable conviction that war crimes should be punished. In practice, conflict regulation is often only possible if an amnesty and other incentives are offered to the rebels, including the prospect of attractive living conditions after the conflict, which collides with normal conceptions of punishment and justice. Government troops either consider that all their actions and deeds were legitimate and are therefore not liable to criminal prosecution, or, in the case of negotiations, they also demand an amnesty. Such expectations attached to the acceptance of a peace settlement mostly allow only "second best" solutions, but ones that are more realistic and practicable (Bogner/Neubert 2013b).

An important task after the end of the fighting is reconstruction. At the same time, experiences of conflict and violence, and of atrocities that have been committed, are remembered, and their physical, social and psychological consequences are omnipresent among the victims. This raises important questions, such as how to provide compensation, support and care for the victims, and how to deal with the perpetrators. The nature of the relationship between victims and perpetrators is also a sensitive issue. Any attempt to find good solutions is bound to come up against fundamental problems, such as that the perpetrators are unknown or cannot be clearly identified, and in the case of forced recruitment, the perpetrators are also victims.

If the perpetrators remain unpunished because an amnesty was the only way to end the fighting, or because they cannot be clearly identified, suitable ways must be found to reintegrate them. This always involves serious challenges. Even where perpetrators are given prison sentences, as in the case of many who were involved in the genocide in Rwanda, there still remains the question of how to reintegrate them after their release.

As a rule, it can be expected that they will return to their families. Because they have fought for their group, they feel they have earned a certain degree of gratitude or respect, or at least understanding. However, as potential or identified participants in attacks on civilians, they are perpetrators who deserve punishment, or who cannot be treated with respect or gratitude, or who must accept that people will have very ambivalent feelings towards them. The knowledge that they have committed violent acts in the past, often over many years, can cause feelings of anxiety and insecurity in people who interact with them on a daily basis.

The political and social consequences of these processes have become an important field of research. They have been studied in projects carried out by Artur Bogner and myself relating to the post-conflict situations in northern Ghana and the West Nile region in Uganda (Bogner/Neubert 2016, 2013b; Bogner/Rosenthal 2017, 2014; see also chapter 5, in this volume). Our empirical results show clearly how little we know about the local, familial and individual processes that take place in these post-conflict situations. The most equivocal situation in the process of re-integration is that of combatants who were forcibly recruited as children because they are perpetrators and victims at the same time. There is nothing surprising or new about the tensions between former combatants and civilians, or the uncertainty regarding the status of forcibly recruited soldiers as victims or perpetrators (Conteh-Morgan 2013; Honwana 2006; Lakeberg Dridi 2004; Peters 2005). It is generally thought that certain reintegration and reconciliation measures will be sufficient to overcome these problems. However, there are hardly any independent studies on the effectiveness of these measures. Such studies are mostly conducted by or for local humanitarian organizations and NGOs, or are connected with conflict regulation processes and appraisal or defense of the interests of the different conflict parties.

What these studies tend to ignore, or mention only briefly, are the micro-processes. The individual biographical interviews we conducted in the context of field research on the post-conflict situation in West Nile showed that these micro-processes cannot be satisfactorily investigated as part of a broadly designed study, but require a methodological re-orientation and a special focus on these processes. With this in mind, we set up a new research project in cooperation with Gabriele Rosenthal, whose methodological approach was optimally suited to this purpose, and who was familiar with the field from a previous project in which she had taken part. The present volume is based chiefly on the results of this new project. In the last chapter, the results are contrasted with our findings in respect of the ex-rebels in West Nile, revealing how the position of the former rebels within their local social environment differs in the two regions.

In order to do justice to this new research topic, we decided to conduct fieldwork in the neighboring region in northern Uganda, which was the main area of operation of the "Lord's Resistance Army" (LRA). The LRA under its charismatic leader, Joseph Kony, has become an icon of brutal decentralized conflicts and the forcible recruitment and abuse of child soldiers. The military activities of the LRA in Uganda ended in 2006 when Kony's army was decimated and driven out of the country. It is believed that the remnants of the LRA are living in areas of lawlessness and violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic. There are only occasional reports of their continued acts of violence, a consequence of the inaccessibility of these regions for journalists. The forced recruitment of child soldiers by warlords and rebels was, and still is, frequently practiced in decentralized conflicts, not only by the LRA. The reintegration processes studied in this book are of great relevance for earlier conflicts, such as those in Mozambique,

Angola, Liberia and Sierra Leone, and also for present conflicts, for example in the DR Congo or the Central African Republic.

The former threat posed by the LRA in Uganda is associated with images of children leaving their homes at night to seek protection in guarded places such as schools or community centers. In the year 2012, such images and videos were used for a social media campaign to capture the LRA leader Joseph Kony (Lee 2014: 208–212), which implied that the LRA was still active in Uganda. This was striking confirmation of the terror spread by the LRA. Due to the LRA's tragic notoriety, considerable academic attention has been paid to it and to the post-conflict processes in Acholiland in northern Uganda, its former area of operation (see chapter 2.3). The relatively short boom in northern Uganda of NGOs specializing in post-conflict regulation resulted in a number of studies dedicated to the situation and reintegration of former rebel fighters. In the meantime most of these NGOs have ended their projects and moved to other places. Despite a great number of reports, studies and success stories, we know surprisingly little about the abduction processes, and how these processes were perceived by the forcibly recruited child soldiers (most of whom are now adults). Similarly, information about the concrete treatment of returnees by members of their families and their communities, and the concrete experiences of the latter, scarcely penetrates the surface of everyday observations. This is not due to a lack of interest; the important point is that common research methods, based for instance on structured or guided interviews, are not adequate for gaining access to this field. Encouraging people to speak about their memories and associated emotions, and their equivocal reintegration, requires great sensitivity and patience, and an appropriate methodology. Gabriele Rosenthal and Artur Bogner are pioneers in this field, using in-depth biographical interviews that are extended to include members of the interviewee's family. This makes it possible to analyze the relationships between child soldiers and members of their families, and their respective interpretations, from different perspectives. The data for the project was collected in the course of five joint field trips and over many months, including pilot studies. By conducting multiple interviews with the same individuals, it was possible to build up a relationship of trust that enabled many of them to talk openly about their memories and emotions, and their current condition.

Thus, these two scholars have developed a unique approach to fieldwork in the context of African civil wars. They not only offer a scaringly graphic account of the traumas suffered by child soldiers, but also reveal the open, and more importantly the hidden, tensions, contradictions and ambivalences in relationships between former child soldiers and their families and neighbors, from whom they are often deeply estranged. They also reconstruct the strategies which former child soldiers use to avoid stigmatization, such as trying to remain invisible, or adapting unconditionally to external ascriptions. These insights close an important gap in post-conflict research in Africa.

Bayreuth, March 2020

1 Introduction

Artur Bogner & Gabriele Rosenthal

This book focuses on returned former child soldiers of the so-called Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda, and their reintegration into public, occupational and family life. In the last chapter (chapter 5), we will compare their history and present situation with that of ex-rebels in the neighboring region of West Nile, and discuss the instructive similarities and differences between these different rebel groups in northern Uganda. An important difference is that in almost all cases the ex-rebels in West Nile are men who joined the rebels as adults and (at least formally) as volunteers.

The following chapters were originally written relatively independently of each other. The empirical data stem from biographical and ethnographic interviews, expert interviews, group discussions, and participant observations conducted by Artur Bogner and Gabriele Rosenthal in the context of two DFG-funded research projects on local peace and post-war processes in Uganda between 2009 and 2017.[1] The project leader was Dieter Neubert, University of Bayreuth. Katharina Teutenberg assisted with the analysis of the group discussions (see chapter 3), and Josephine Schmiereck with the analysis of the interviews (see chapter 4). They are co-authors of the respective chapters.

The LRA is an armed grouping or rebel group founded in northern Uganda around 1987. Its leaders use messianic, apocalyptic ideas and concepts, borrowed

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[1] A) "Conflict regulation and post-conflict processes in Ghana and Uganda", 2009-2012 (DFG number: NE 640/3-1; B) "Child Soldiers in context. Biographies, familial and collective trajectories in northern Uganda", 2014-2017 (DFG number: NE 640/7-1/2).

largely from Christian traditions (but partly also from the local religion, or local cults in this region), to account for their actions. Its charismatic leader, Joseph Kony, claims to have paranormal ('supernatural') abilities. The LRA became known mainly through the forced recruitment of thousands of children and adolescents who were trained as soldiers or forced to 'marry' members of the rebel group. In the way it combines 'religious' and messianic ideas with military and armed actions, and in its use of child soldiers and enslaved girls, it resembles 'Boko Haram' and 'Islamic State', so-called terror militias that have become widely known more recently. In the case of the LRA (as well as its predecessor, the so-called *Holy Spirit Movement*), this messianic discourse was combined from the start with an *ethno-political discourse* which portrayed the Acholi of northern Uganda as a persistent collective victim of discrimination and persecution by central governments led by politicians from other regions or ethnic groupings (see Behrend 1999; Branch 2010; Van Acker 2004; and chapter 5, in this volume). But unlike all other, or earlier, rebel groups in Uganda, the LRA made the violent abduction or enslavement of children (preferably aged between twelve and fourteen) its main method of recruitment and concentrated its activities on attacking the civilian population.[2]

It has been estimated that between 1987 and 2006 the LRA abducted between 24,000 and 66,000 young people in the central north of Uganda alone, especially in Acholiland (with the higher figure being the more plausible). At the time of their abduction the great majority of the abductees were under eighteen, and most were between the ages of ten and fourteen (Blattman/Annan 2010: esp. 139, 138, 133–137). The LRA was able to operate in northern Uganda up to 2006, especially in areas belonging to the former district of Acholiland. They invaded compounds, plundered them, conducted various massacres, and abducted children and adolescents. Older civilians and children under ten were often forced to accompany them for several days, mostly to help carry the loot. The LRA fighters frequently killed civilians, among them the relatives of escaped abductees, and destroyed their compounds.

Many abductees only succeeded in escaping after many years, at a time when they had reached adulthood; often they had children of their own, following a forced marriage. By running away, they not only put their own lives at risk, but also ran the risk of atrocities being committed against their families as revenge. Escaping from the LRA was generally an *individual* matter, a sudden event that became possible as the result of a serious injury, a lost battle, or capture by government forces or their allies. Quite often it was a question of either running away or being executed (due to lack of mobility, or internal conflicts and tensions). Return, flight or desertion often happened spontaneously following an unplanned separation from fellow fighters, the commander, or the person the individual had been forced to marry, all people

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[2] See foremost Berntsen (2010) and Blattman/Annan (2010). For details of the early phase of this practice by the LRA, see Behrend (1999: 194f.).

with whom a close relationship may have developed in the course of time. The escape was usually not planned beforehand, and in most cases had not been discussed with comrades – if one can speak of 'comrades' in this context. Former child soldiers of the LRA repeatedly told us in interviews that in the 'bush' it was dangerous to form friendships with others, because there was always a risk that they might betray your forbidden intentions or wishes, or that you might be forced to betray their secrets. As their friend (and to prove your own innocence) you might then be forced to kill them, or conversely they might be forced to kill you for the same reasons[3].

In the light of these extremely distressing and often highly traumatizing experiences, we were surprised how easy it was for us to gain access to the field. We had no problem entering into discussions with ex-rebels, and developed intensive relations with them over the years. This is in part due to the fact that we concentrated on just a few interviewees and visited them many times in the course of several field trips. This also helped us to gain access to their relatives, both in their families of origin and in the families which they founded. We often noticed how pleased our interviewees were that we kept coming to see them. With time, a relation of trust developed, especially with the ex-rebels among our interviewees, some of whom we had first met in 2011/2012 in the context of the first of the two above-mentioned projects. It is perhaps useful to point out here that the interviewees sometimes mentioned important aspects of their life stories and experiences only during later interviews, or told stories which differed considerably from what they had said in their first interview. This is one of the reasons why data collected during only a single interview must always be treated with great caution.

We must also admit that our view of the former child soldiers was biased in the sense that all the interviews we conducted with their relatives were mediated or desired by the ex-rebels themselves. In family interviews at which the ex-rebels were present, we paid attention to their stability, and ensured that the dialogue did not weaken but, on the contrary, strengthened their position in their social or familial environment. How necessary this was can be seen in two cases where the ex-rebels had had very little contact, or none at all, with their families since their return, and where their relatives failed to show empathy for the returnees. In respect of the methodology and ethical aspects of our research, caring for the physical and mental state of the interviewees is a decisive issue, as well as the way our research activities affect their position(s) in their familial and other social figurations, especially in their local environment. For people in rural Africa, but often also for people who live in towns, this local environment is extremely important because having access to land for a small farm is essential to survival. As a rule, rights of land use and access to agricultural labor depend on a person's relations with the leaders or opinion leaders in his or her family or local community. Another reason is that social networks based on kinship and neighborly relations must be relied on to meet needs that in wealthier

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[3] On the organizational structure and worldview of the LRA, see esp. Mergelsberg (2010); Titeca (2010).

welfare states are largely covered by health insurance schemes, pension schemes, unemployment insurance, nursing care insurance, and social welfare benefits.

    We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the people in Uganda who agreed to let us interview them, and who gave us insights into their life with all its pain and suffering. Without them our research would not have been possible. We would also like to thank all those colleagues who supported us and our work during these years. During our field trips in 2012 and 2014/2015, Geoffrey Okello (Koch Goma) was our faithful interpreter and field assistant. Due to his long and successful career in the local civil society in Gulu (especially in the umbrella organization of the local NGOs), he was extremely useful to us because he was familiar with many issues relevant to our research and knew the corresponding "key actors". To him we are very grateful. Because of his own professional duties, he was not able to assist us during our fieldwork in 2015/2016 and 2017. He therefore persuaded George Ochan to take on the job, trained him in his new duties, and introduced him to our existing interviewees, as preparation for further interviews. G. Ochan was our field assistant and interpreter during our next two periods of fieldwork; we are very grateful to him for his competent work. We are also deeply indebted to Droma Geoffrey, who worked as our field assistant in West Nile between 2009 and 2012. He helped us to make our first contacts in Acholiland, and he assisted us there in our first interviews, which were conducted in English.

    Josephine Schmiereck and Katharina Teutenberg gave us invaluable help with the task of analyzing our very large corpus of data, and contributed to the writing of the following chapters. We are extremely grateful for their dedicated and competent support.

    A special mention goes to Dieter Neubert, the project leader, who supported us throughout the years with his expert advice, and gave us freedom to conduct the research in our own way.

    We are also grateful to David L. Kibikyo for his support of our research in Uganda. He was always willing to give us advice and institutional help from the time of our first field trip to Uganda in 2009. My thanks go to all those who have helped us with the production of this English edition, especially to Sabrina Krohm, and of course to Friederike von Ass, Johannes Becker, Sevil Çakır-Kılınçoğlu, Lucas cé Sangalli and Tim Sievert. We are grateful to Ruth Schubert for her painstaking translation.

    In this book we discuss the biographical experiences of former child soldiers before, during and after their abduction, the circumstance of their return to civilian life, and the relational structures or figurations that can be observed between them and civilians living in Acholiland, including their own families of origin. Our first focus will be on these figurations after the return of the ex-rebels (chapter 3). After this (chapter 4), we present the biographies of three returned child soldiers and attempt to identify the (everyday) conditions which made reintegration into civilian life easier or more difficult for them after their return. In chapter 5 we compare the

present situation of returned ex-rebels in Acholiland and in West Nile. This comparison shows to what extent the latter, unlike those in Acholiland, have a strong we-image, established networks, and, above all, prestige among the local people, which gives them much higher power chances within their region than the ex-rebels in Acholiland.

Berlin, January 2020

2 On the history of northern Uganda

Artur Bogner

Preliminary remark. The main focus in this chapter is on the history of the rebellion in Acholiland, and on the escalation and de-escalation of the conflict in the neighboring region of West Nile.

2.1   The Acholi: A military tradition

Our observation that the dialogue between civilians and returned former child soldiers is only just beginning can be better understood and explained by taking a look at the history of Uganda, and especially northern Uganda, which has been deeply scarred by organized violence and armed conflicts. This history is marked by several violent changes of government and subsequent "cleansings" of the army and the state apparatus, as well as various armed rebellions, triggered as a rule by these changes of government (see for example Kagoro 2015: 45–92; Van Acker 2004; Doom/Vlassenroot 1999: 7f., 13). For people who have grown up, or lived for a long time, in generally non-violent conditions, it is often not easy to comprehend the diverse social impacts of such large-scale collective acts of violence, and their deep and lasting effects on the everyday life and biographies of those who are affected or involved. In view of a past that for generations has been shaped by macro-violence, i.e. by civil war or persecution, in which Acholi were persecuted in some phases, while in other phases it was rather Acholi who subjected members of other ethnic, regional or socio-political groupings to persecution, we can assume that in most families, local associations and village communities there are unprocessed

memories of suffering from, or of participating in, collective acts of violence, or (not to be neglected!) having witnessed such acts.[1] We observed that some older relatives of ex-rebels who had experienced attacks on their compounds, or the murder, capture or abduction of members of their families, were unable to explain the historical circumstances, or to say which groupings the perpetrators belonged to, or that they did not want to talk about these events, or perhaps even to remember them. This is not surprising, since (in view of the way socio-political alliances and enmities have changed in the course of time) it would often breach the rules of the discourses that have today become established in northern Uganda (see below). Every family history or family memory is full of collective or individual experiences of violence. Not infrequently, these happened within families or kin groups, or were caused by tensions in or between them. Moreover, for a long time people felt insecure even during the "time of peace", a very simplifying term that we use to refer to the time after 2006 because then the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) was no longer able to enter Uganda as a military force.

While returned ex-rebels often enlist voluntarily in the Ugandan government army or take up jobs with private security firms, and thus experience a kind of 'reintegration' into Ugandan society (cf. the case of Sancho described in chapter 4.3), their personal past history and their family history are often marked by forced recruitment or similar events.

As in many other parts of Africa, the history of northern Uganda and of the Acholi, who besides the Langi and Lugbara are the biggest ethnic grouping in this region, is marked by the long-term consequences of precolonial slave hunting and the colonial labor division which made northern Uganda (and other parts of the country) a hinterland and reservoir for the recruitment of migrant laborers and soldiers for the politico-economic heartland around the kingdom of Buganda (e.g. Mutibwa 1992: 2–10; Behrend 1999: 17–21; Buckley-Zistel 2008; Leopold 2005; on West Nile, see Eckert 2010). The linguistic and ethnic groupings of northern Uganda (which was otherwise economically and socially disadvantaged) thus became the most important milieus of origin of soldiers, not only under the colonial administration, but also under the postcolonial governments (see especially Kagoro 2015: chapters 3 and 4; Schubert 2008). This had important long-term consequences for Uganda's political history – and not least for the "reputation" of these groupings, i.e. their collective they-image and collective self-image. Both among the Acholi and in the neighboring region of West Nile, it became "normal", or even a tradition, that suitable young men were recruited as soldiers by the government army. Early on, this became a subject of collective (and thus also individual) pride in the we-groups concerned, and a central feature of their own self-descriptions. In the families we interviewed, the voluntary or forced recruitment of men into armed groups or armies

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[1] With regard to the number of civilians, the great majority are surely victims and not perpetrators of collective violence, even if only adults are counted. But things look different on the level of large we- and they-groups.

runs through the family history. In the grandparents' generation this often meant recruitment into the British army in the Second World War,[2] and in the fathers' generation into the national army, especially during Milton Obote's two periods of government (1962–1971 and 1980–1985). During Obote's exile many of them were members of his guerilla forces in Tanzania and were involved in deposing Idi Amin (for details of Tom's family, for instance, see chapter 3.4).

The preference for recruiting Acholi (and other people from the northerly regions) into the army thus continued after independence in 1962, even if Acholi, and, for example, Iteso (from eastern Uganda), were also increasingly appointed to positions in the civil service (not least thanks to the efforts of Christian missions and their schools). In the long term, these groupings came to believe that their people were particularly well qualified for, and thus in a privileged way entitled to, positions in the army, the police and the civil service. This view of the people in northern Uganda as being traditionally warlike and skilled warriors was promoted before and during the colonial period by early interpretations, mistaken impressions and standard images or typifications on the part of Europeans, because these people lived in acephalous societies (i.e. their usual forms of socio-political organization were decentral and not centralistically structured). This was exploited by the colonizers in their pursuit of deliberately divisive policies and (this must be underlined) the *demilitarization* of centralistic groups with a state or state-like organization, such as the Baganda, the people dominating in the Buganda kingdom (see Schubert 2008: 278, 282f. and passim; Kagoro 2015: 45ff.). By contrast, the colonial administration more or less calculatedly (and certainly purposefully) subjected the decentrally organized groupings in the north of Uganda to a kind of militarization (in the sense of familiarizing them with modern forms of military organization and military discipline), thus creating a division of labor and a sociopolitical differentiation or split between the different linguistic and ethnic groupings (ibid.). This constellation resulted later on in a peculiar imbalance and sociopolitical split in the independent state of Uganda: while the northern regions were disadvantaged, both economically and in the sense of social status (or "prestige"), and their infrastructure, including educational institutions, was developed much more slowly than in the heartland of Buganda and other "southern" parts of the country, many people from the north gained a favorable, even relatively privileged position in the armed forces and the "security sector", and thus indirectly in the colonial, and especially the postcolonial, state apparatus. The resulting divergence and disparity was desired, at least to a certain extent, by the colonial administration. By means of this division of labor and polarization, it intended to prevent a concentration of sources of power or "forms of capital"

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[2] "The colonial administration recruited 77,131 Ugandans to serve in nine infantry units, two field artillery batteries, and several auxiliary battalions. Ugandans served outside Africa for the first time, seeing action in the occupation of Madagascar in opposition to the Vichy government in France and the reconquest of Burma from the Japanese." http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-14151.html (accessed: 22 November 2017). See also Summers (2015).

in the sense proposed by Pierre Bourdieu, in one part of the population, or one part of the country.

In northern Uganda, typical career and life course patterns developed from these roots, as well as life models and ideals, at least among many of the Acholi and their neighbors (see for example Schubert 2008; Atkinson 2010a: 275f.; Leopold 2005; Rice 2009; Eckert 2010). The relatively well-known life of Idi Amin is an informative example of biographical trajectories of Acholi or other Ugandans from the north of the country who rose up the career ladder and the social ladder in the "security sector" of the colonial or postcolonial state (in Amin's case he was not Acholi but came from the neighboring region of West Nile).

2.2   Changing power relations between the Ugandan central government and the Acholi

The dramatic changes in the power chances of the Acholi in their figuration with the leading groupings in the central government were due largely to the governments of Milton Obote and Amin. Both Obote and Amin came from the north. While Obote belonged to the ethnic grouping of the Langi, who live to the south of Acholiland, Amin was a Kakwa from West Nile. Obote and Amin were allies for a few years before it came to a violent confrontation. These developments tend to be ignored or played down in dominant everyday, political and scholarly discourses on the war in Acholiland today. But because we believe that ignoring them makes it more difficult to understand the historical roots of the LRA and its extreme violence and intransigence, we will take a closer look at them.

The economic inequality in favor of the "south", especially the heartland around Lake Victoria and the kingdom of Buganda, existed already in precolonial times but was greatly reinforced by the colonial administration and the various transformations caused by it, and has basically not changed to this day. On the contrary, the civil wars or armed conflicts since 1979, or even since 1971, have clearly served to widen this gap. In the first historical phase after Uganda's independence, the Acholi were in a relatively favorable sociopolitical power position due to their disproportionate numbers in the army and the police force. This brought them certain economic privileges (in particular civil service jobs), but the private economic sector was dominated by members of other groupings, such as the Baganda and the "Indians". These limited privileges are perhaps all the more significant because they never, or not in the long term, had any essential impact on the general economic inequality between northern Uganda and the more southerly, more prosperous parts of the country.

Under the increasingly autocratic first postcolonial government headed by Obote (see Rice 2009; Mutibwa: 1992: 22–77), ethnic patterns of group identification and the corresponding forms of social or sociopolitical (group) differentiation became increasingly politicized or radicalized (Branch 2011: 56, 54ff.). During this period, the Acholi as a distinct grouping of the population, and Acholi members of the

army, administration and ruling party developed into the most important pillars of his power.[3] When Obote fell from power in 1971 following a coup by Idi Amin, the commander of the army, they lost their relatively privileged position, which had given them considerable power chances and certain economic advantages (Branch 2011: 46–57). Until then Amin had been an ally of Obote, especially in the struggle for power between Obote and the first president of Uganda (who was also the king of Buganda). The former political role of Acholi army officers and state functionaries was taken over to a large extent by people from West Nile (Amin's home region), including members of the Lugbara. Thousands of Acholi – especially higher-ranking army officers and their relatives – were persecuted and murdered by Amin's government because they were suspected of supporting his predecessor (ibid.: 56f.; Reid 2017: 60). The dominant public discourse, as well as historians (and Amnesty International), estimate that up to 300,000 people were murdered in Uganda under Amin's rule (see Reid 2017: 63; Mutibwa 2016: 292; Kasozi 1994: 104; Jørgensen 1981: 314f.; Jagielski 2012: 71). Jørgensen doubts if these estimates are accurate, with plausible arguments, and believes that a figure of 30,000 would be more realistic. At the same time, he assumes that many more people died as a result of economic mismanagement or crimes and corruption under Amin's despotic regime (ibid.: 314f.). Wherever the truth may lie, the Acholi, who were previously associated with a kind of military elite or privileged social class, were certainly one of the groups most seriously affected. The high estimated number of victims at least gives us an idea of how groupings such as the Acholi experienced Amin's dictatorship at the time, or how they interpret it in retrospect. Our interviewees repeatedly spoke about relatives who were murdered by Amin's soldiers or government functionaries.

In 1979, Amin's regime was overthrown by Ugandan rebels (mostly supporters or allies of Obote) with the decisive help of the Tanzanian army. This led to widespread violence, including massacres by the victorious rebels, or soldiers of the subsequent short-lived governments, against the people of West Nile who were considered to be Amin's most important ethnopolitical or regional power base. In the historical and academic literature, these acts of violence, which are often interpreted as revenge for the murder of thousands of Acholi under Amin, are attributed in particular to the Acholi and Langi among the soldiers serving the new rulers (Mutibwa 1992: 137–142; Branch 2011: 58; Refugee Law Project 2004: 5f., 18; Mischnik/Bauer 2009: 11f.; Pirouet 1995: 362, 298, 304f.).

This phase in the history of Uganda, the role of "the" Acholi as victims during Amin's very violent dictatorship, and what is at least publicly perceived as "their"

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[3] For a good general outline of the history of Uganda, see Schubert (2008), and for summaries of this history with a special emphasis on the conflicts in Acholiland, see Branch (2011: 45–89, 2010); Vorhölter (2014: ch. 3); Atkinson (2010a). Behrend (1999) gives a very instructive account of the early phase of the LRA and its predecessor organization(s). Van Acker (2004) provides one of the most judicious analyses of these conflicts.

role as avengers or perpetrators during the periods of office of Amin's direct suc-
cessors, tends to be marginalized today in the dominant political discourse in north-
ern Uganda, as well as in social science discourses.[4] This is because these discourses
mainly concentrate on the opposition between "the" Acholi and the current govern-
ment led by Museveni, together with critiques of the latter (whether positive or neg-
ative). Any thematization of internal tensions in northern Uganda, especially be-
tween West Nile and Acholiland, or their respective we-groups, and of the genesis
of these tensions, would be disturbing and would complicate things. It seems to us
that the common (at least partial) de-thematization of the historical chapter "Idi
Amin", with all its fault lines and conflict potentials, has the effect that this phase in
collective and family histories has remained largely unprocessed in everyday dis-
courses and family dialogues in Acholiland. This means that in public and informal
discourses there is only a fragmented awareness of the long-term legacy of Amin's
dictatorship, which was characterized by a *double confrontation* – against not only
Obote's sympathizers, who were especially strong in the central part of northern
Uganda including Acholiland, but also opposition groupings in other parts of the
country. This applies especially to parts of the Baganda in the Ugandan heartland.
Their king, Sir Edward Mutesa II, became president of Uganda in 1963, but was
overthrown by Obote with the aid of Amin, then deputy commander of the army,
in a kind of "internal" coup (Mutibwa 1992: 53ff., 2016).

These events and public interpretations of them are at least partly responsible
for the widespread view that the LRA conflict and the tensions between Museveni's
regime and "the" Acholi are the expression of a political (and in many interpretations
mainly economic) north-south opposition. The bloody contest for power between
the one-time allies and later enemies, Obote and Amin, belies this interpretation.
The coup, as we may justifiably call the overthrow of the president by his prime
minister with the support of parts of the army, and the subsequent gradual transfor-
mation of Uganda into an autocracy, is trivialized in what some authors have referred
to as the "counter discourse" (cf. Vorhölter 2014: 99–112). According to it, this
event can be explained as ending the privileges bestowed upon the Buganda monar-
chy by the colonial administration (which is of course to some extent true). *The vio-
lent, unconstitutional and contentious nature* of this transformation is neglected, and indeed
rarely mentioned. However, one could justifiably argue that this break, with the abo-
lition of the first constitution and the removal of a multiparty regime, laid the foun-
dation for the later military coup and seizure of power by Amin, as the commander

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[4] The important article by Van Acker (2004) is an instructive exception; others are: Doom/Vlassenroot
(1999); Branch (2010, 2011: ch. 2); Kagoro (2015: ch. 3). The (presumed) role of some Acholi as
avengers or perpetrators in these violent acts is typically emphasized or discussed by older authors,
such as Mutibwa (1992:137–141, 2016). Vorhölter (2014) and Atkinson (2010a) refer to the hegemonic
discourse among intellectuals and social scientists as a "counter discourse", presumably because it con-
tradicts, or at least differs in various ways from, the prevailing discourses in the ruling party, and seem-
ingly among most people in Uganda, or the opinions and views expressed in these discourses.

of the army, against Obote as the head of state – and more generally for the long-term development of a state in which the specialists in military violence were no longer supervised and controlled by other authorities, and in which "violence became a solution of first rather than last resort, in which every war can be justified since it is always embedded in a history of attack and counterattack, of suffering and revenge" (Van Acker 2004: 336; see also Doom/Vlassenroot 1999: 7f.; Schubert 2008: 288f.; Mutibwa 1992: 39f., 122 and passim).

At least from today's perspective, it is difficult to overlook the fact that these events, or this chain of events, were a significant turning point in the history of postcolonial Uganda.

The economistic (and often Marxist-Leninist) discourse that dominates among intellectuals and in the political opposition today marginalizes the obvious fact that here lie the historical beginnings, at any rate within the postcolonial period, of an almost uninterrupted process of brutalization or *decivilization* – in a literal as well as a figurative sense, that is a militarization (or often rather warriorization) of political and economic power and a degradation of social life[5] in a more general sense - which continued far into the time of the present government, and in some ways to the present day (see Mutibwa 1992; Kasozi 1994: 193; Behrend 1999: 19, 191f., 189; Van Acker 2004; Kagoro 2015).

The neglect of these events and relationships often leads today to historical interpretations which attribute the lasting tensions or conflicts in Uganda only, or mainly, to the persistent socioeconomic inequality between the north and the rest of the country. The limitations of this frequently heard interpretation, or its various versions, which differ from each other mainly in the way they assign historical responsibility for this disparity or its continuation, can clearly be seen in respect of Amin's times as deputy commander or commander of the army and leader of the government, and the formation of political fronts or axes of tension during these times.

If we consider what happened during Obote's second government, especially the fact that now "the" Acholi and "the" Langi were again among the most powerful groupings in Uganda, it is easy to understand the fierce opposition to Museveni's government which has dominated among the Acholi ever since he seized power, since this led once again to the loss of their once relatively favorable position with regard to social and military power and political influence in Uganda. Just as important, or perhaps more important, is the fact that the victory of Museveni's rebel movement, the NRA, must have seemed to most Acholi in many ways like a repetition of the collective trauma of Amin's coup and the first two years of his rule (Behrend 1999: 17).

In 1980, after what were very probably rigged elections, Obote's second government came to power but was soon confronted by another rebel movement under

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[5] Heike Behrend (1999) uses expressions such as "process of dehumanization" (p. 189) and "militarization of politics" (pp. 19, 23) in this context.

the leadership of Yoweri Museveni, a former ally of Obote. This led to an extremely bloody civil war with up to several hundred thousand dead (according to some estimates), lasting from 1982 to 1986 (see Kasozi 1994: 180; Mutibwa 1992: 159). Meanwhile, even more so than during Obote's first government, soldiers and officials belonging to the Acholi had become his most important supporters inside the army and the government (apart from members of Obote's own ethnic grouping, the Langi). The numerous war crimes and massive human rights violations committed by Obote's soldiers during the civil war were largely attributed to the Acholi among them (Doom/Vlassenroot 1999: 9; Mutibwa 1992: 157; Lamwaka 2016: 14ff., especially 16). This most intensive phase of the Ugandan civil war, marked chiefly by the struggle between Obote's second regime and Museveni's rebel movement, the *National Resistance Army* or *National Resistance Movement* (NRA/NRM), was nearing its end when in 1985 Obote was again overthrown by a coup led by two Acholi generals. A peace agreement that was negotiated between the leaders of the coup and Museveni was only weeks later breached by his rebels, who claimed that the other side had breached it first (for this version see Mutibwa 1992: 175f.). Acholi opinion leaders felt that the breaching of this agreement was a malicious betrayal, especially since the leaders of the coup against Obote were Acholi.[6]

A few months later, many massive human rights violations directed chiefly against Acholi were committed during and after the seizure of power by Museveni's NRA, especially when the victorious rebel fighters and soldiers of Museveni's new government invaded their home area, and during the early phase of the rebellion against the new government which followed (with a delay) (see Branch 2011: 64–70; Van Acker 2004: 339–341). These violent acts were obviously directed especially against the Acholi. In the history and the social science literature, there is disagreement on whether government soldiers committed human rights violations in reaction to the persistent armed resistance in Acholiland, or whether the resistance by the Acholi was a reaction to the brutal and indiscriminate violence against the local population by Museveni's victorious National Resistance Army (NRA) (as argued for instance by Branch 2011: 63–70; cf. Reid 2017: 89; less clear-cut is the account of this phase of the conflict in Behrend 1999: 24f.). From the perspective of the civilian population in Acholiland, this was a time in which violence was inflicted on them by the new government. This violence led to the formation of rebel groups such as the "Uganda People's Democratic Army" (UPDA) and Alice Lakwena's "Holy Spirit Movement" (HSM, in 1986/87), and the LRA not long after, and explains why they were given much support by the civilian population in Acholiland, at least initially.

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[6] The ethnopolitical one-sidedness of the so-called counter discourse can be seen in the case of the 1985 military coup. Dominant views among "critical" intellectuals as well as among Acholi opinion leaders see nothing problematic about this change of power, which is obviously connected with the fact that it was led by Acholi soldiers (see Jagielski 2012: 71; Van Acker 2004: 340).

It would hardly be exaggerating to say that this development marked a peak, or a rather late phase, in a protracted process of decivilization – of both political power and everyday life – which began with the two coups by Obote and Amin, in 1966 and 1971, and continued during Obote's second regime and, in particular in Acholiland, also after Museveni's NRA seized power in January 1986. (The earlier phase of this process is impressively described in Rice 2009).

In the course of this long-term process, physical violence on a large scale became a permanent feature not only of political power struggles in the capital, but of everyday life in many parts of the country. Amin's accession to power marked a point in time after which various waves of violence by state functionaries more or less recurrently affected everyday life in Acholiland. Thus, for many Acholi the conquest of power by Museveni meant the return of a traumatic experience on both a personal and a collective level, since it clearly recalled Amin's military coup and the subsequent persecution and murder of many prominent Acholi (see for example Behrend 1999: 17). A long-term development of this kind can be regarded as not significant only as long as one assumes *a priori* that the history of societies and states is determined primarily by economic[7] factors.

However, after January 1986 there were also rebel groups in other parts of the country which fought against the new government in the following years, for instance in the Teso region in eastern Uganda, and later in West Nile from 1994 to 2002.[8] The groupings of the population from which these rebels came were also subjected to widespread acts of violence by government soldiers against civilians. In this phase of the civil war in northern Uganda, people from West Nile (including soldiers or former soldiers) with whom the Acholi once had hostile relations, became allies of the short-lived military government of the Okellos in 1985, and potential allies and sympathizers of the later rebel movements in Acholiland.[9]

In the following years the new central government fast gained firm control over most other parts of the country, but had to struggle hard for the consolidation of its military supremacy in the north of Uganda – and did not completely succeed until 2006. The most persistent resistance came from the ranks of the Acholi, whose two strongest rebel groups at that time, the messianic 'Holy Spirit Movement' (HSM) under the leadership of Alice Lakwena, and the 'Uganda People's Democratic Army'

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[7] A frequent and typical shortcoming of such explanations is that they often refer to a determinant which lacks sufficient specificity in an African context - such as a persistent economic inequality between different regions of a country, or a wealth of some mineral resources.

[8] See Prunier 2004; Refugee Law Project 2004; Buckley-Zistel 2008: esp. 65–110; Bauer 2009; Mischnick/Bauer 2009; Bogner/Neubert 2016, 2012, 2013b, 2013a; Bogner/Rosenthal 2014.

[9] This found expression amongst others in the fact that the perhaps highest spirit guiding the LRA and its leader or spirit medium Kony was called Juma Oris, that is by the name of a former minister under Amin. After the end of Amin's regime, Juma Oris, who was born in West Nile, became a founder of various rebel groups fighting against the succeeding governments (Behrend 1999: 179, 185, 23; Leopold 2005: 44; Mischnick/Bauer 2009: 18, 13–15).

(UPDA), brought Museveni's young government to the brink of a military defeat in 1987 (Behrend 1999: 172–197). The many severe human rights abuses and massacres which were allegedly committed by Acholi in the government armies, during the civil war between 1981 and 1986, and those later committed against the civilian population of Acholiland by Museveni's rebels and then by his government army between 1986 and 2006, have decisively influenced interpretations of the conflict to this day.[10]

The multiple waves or strands of armed rebellion in northern Uganda, the most important and long-lasting of which was the rebellion by the LRA from 1988 onward, continued for around two decades – at least up to 2006 when the government army succeeded in driving the LRA fighters out of Uganda (see Baines 2008; Allen/Vlassenroot 2010b). Since then the LRA has only been able to operate outside Uganda, in the environs of Garamba National Park, where it attacks civilians and abducts children and adolescents from population groupings that have no connection with the Acholi or Uganda.

Many observers agree that in the long period of time since Amin's seizure of power, Uganda and especially northern Uganda have undergone a decivilizing process as defined in figurational sociology (see for example Swaan 1997), which, besides forms of state violence, has also affected the methods of armed rebellion and considerable parts of everyday life[11] in Uganda.[12] This is a theory which can be demonstrated and plausibilized by the development of fighting and recruitment methods in the armed conflicts. Like Alice Lakwena's earlier HSM, the LRA led by Joseph Kony, her alleged cousin, unites the features of a rebel army with those of a messianic sect. The LRA took over some of these features, and relevant parts of its ideology, directly from the HSM.[13] But unlike all other, or earlier, rebel groups in Uganda, the LRA made the violent abduction of children its main method of recruitment and concentrated its activities on attacking the civilian population.[14] The

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[10] For an instructive discussion of the different discourses on, or interpretations of, the war in Acholiland, cf. Vorhölter (2014: ch. 3), and furthermore Lamwaka (2016: 14–17).

[11] It would require another article at least as long as this one to discuss the relationship between the process of increasing cruelty and the phenomena frequently referred to in the literature on Uganda as "militarization" (involving very heterogeneous and contradictory features), on the one hand, and sociological concepts of long-term processes of "civilization", "pacification" or (in German) "Disziplinierung", on the other hand. For a well-informed introduction to the latter concepts in similar contexts, see for example Kuzmics/Haring 2013: ch. 7; Dunning/Mennell 1998; on the concept of, and observations of, "militarization" in Ugandan society, see Schubert 2008; Kagoro 2015; Mazrui 1977.

[12] See for example Mutibwa 1992: 122ff., 157, 173 and passim; Kasozi 1994: 193; Behrend 1999: 191f., 189, 195; Kagoro 2015; on the Ugandan police, see Biecker/Schlichte 2014.

[13] For details, see Behrend 1999: esp. 179ff. For useful accounts of the worldview of the LRA, see Titeca 2010; Mergelsberg 2010; Allen 2006: 30–44.

[14] According to well-founded estimates, between 24,000 and 66,000 children were abducted in central northern Uganda alone – the higher of the two figures being better substantiated (Blattman/Annan 2010: 133–139; Annan et al. 2006, 2008; Pham et al. 2007; Pham/Vinck 2010: 22; for a summary, see

forced recruitment or enslavement of minors (preferably aged below 15), which mostly took place in the context of bloody raids on their villages or families and the committing of atrocities, was legitimized in terms of an apocalyptic theory of the existence of pure and impure Acholi which seems to be related to a belief in passive undead (e.g. Behrend 1999: 182ff.), as found for example in West African concepts of witchcraft and illness.[15] In the context of this 'religious' ideology, government supporters or sympathizers, members of the local self-government, and other 'collaborators' from the ranks of the Acholi were not only demonized in a metaphorical sense,[16] but frequently defined as undead or as witches. This must be taken into account, for instance when Branch removes the *principal effect* of this demonization, by reducing it to the 'real' core of the collaboration of parts of the Acholi population with the government (Branch 2011: 69ff., 2010: 40f.). This is actually a transfiguration rather than a 'translation' of the matter into a secularized political discourse. Obviously, this is not the language of the LRA. In other words, Branch offers here a *rationalistic reinterpretation and justification* of the LRA's ideology – and thus indirectly of the killing of numerous abductees defined as witches. In our view, a consideration of the belief in witchcraft and the construction of political opponents as witches or undead (combined with a dichotomous worldview) must be a fundamental element of any analysis and political assessment of the LRA.

Contrary to first appearances, this demonization has much to do with the different offers of peace and amnesty made by the government, which led, for instance, to various forms of cooperation between Acholi groups and Museveni's government following the peace agreement signed in 1988 with the earlier rebel organization UPDA (alias 'Cilil'). This cooperation by many Acholi with the government, and their lack of support for the LRA, are what probably led to the distinction in Kony's worldview between "pure" and "impure", or spoilt, Acholi, and what legitimizes child abduction as a recruiting method in the LRA ideology (Berntsen 2010: 43–52; Branch 2010: 40f.). Among other things, it was this millenarian worldview, and the quasi Manichaean dichotomy that is built into it, that made even those rebel fighters who had been recruited by abduction hesitant to accept the amnesty offered to them from early 2000 onward under the terms of a very generous amnesty law (which up to 2005 even included the highest LRA leaders).

Lorschiedter/Bannink-Mbazzi 2012: 245f.; for an instructive account of the early phase of this practice of the LRA, see Behrend 1999: 194f.).

[15] For an excellent description of an empirical example, see Klein 2009: 161–185.

[16] It is striking that the typical discourse in LRA-apologetic literature virtually fails to acknowledge the existence of the peace agreements and especially the more or less generous amnesties repeatedly offered to various rebel groups by Museveni's government in the past. Among others, these include the 1988 peace agreement with the UPDA (a.k.a. "Cilil") in Acholiland, and the 2002 peace agreement with UNRF II in the neighboring region of West Nile. This observation also applies to Dolan (2011).

2.3   Events in West Nile and the beginning of the peace process in this region

First, it is important to note that, by contrast, the fighters of the rebel groups in West Nile were much more often recruited on a voluntary basis. The recruits were usually adult, and almost exclusively male. Despite many atrocities committed against civilians by all war parties, the conduct of the majority of combatants obviously did not involve the same ostentatious and widespread cruelty, nor did the armed conflicts last as long as in Acholiland. The first of the two waves of armed rebellion in West Nile began in 1979 with the overthrow of Amin's rule, when the civilian population in the region became the target of brutal acts of revenge, including at least one major massacre. According to present-day historians, these were mainly carried out by Acholi and Langi units in the armed forces of the victorious anti-Amin rebels and new rulers.[17] This led, among other things, to an exodus of the majority of the region's population into the neighboring countries of Sudan and Zaire (the present-day DR Congo), especially in the first half of the 1980s. Here, many refugees were exposed to extreme hardships and countless bloody attacks by members of different armed groups of actors (government forces as well as various rebel groups).

Apparently for purposes of self-defense, and for the defense of the civilians connected to them (as in Acholiland a few years later, after the victory of Museveni's rebel movement in the civil war), the rebel groups of West Nile were at first mostly recruited from former soldiers and employees of the toppled regime.[18] In the mid-1980s there began a phase of rapprochement between the rebel groups based in West Nile and Museveni's new government, which took power in 1986, but in this province there was a second wave of armed rebellion between 1994 and 2002 (Prunier 2004; Refugee Law Project 2004; Mischnick/Bauer 2009). From 1995 onward, the initially strong local support for the rebels ebbed as a result of increasing attacks by the rebels on the local civilian population. In 1997, the bigger of the two rebel groups in West Nile, the West Nile Bank Front (WNBF), gave up its armed struggle following military defeats (Prunier 2004). Its surviving members laid down their arms, in some cases collectively in big groups, and under the protection of informal agreements between local "elders" and the government or army chiefs. In 2002 a formal peace agreement was signed between the government and the last active rebel group that was based in the province, the Uganda National Rescue Front

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[17] See Mutibwa 1992:137–142; Kasozi 1994: 176–179; Branch 2011: 58; Mischnick/Bauer 2009: 11–15; Pirouet 1995: 362, 298, 304f.

[18] See Mischnick/Bauer 2009: 4–24; Refugee Law Project 2004; Leopold 2005; Rice 2009; Eckert 2010.

II (UNRF II).[19] The conclusion of this agreement was made easier by the enactment of the aforementioned amnesty law at the beginning of 2000.[20]

A remarkable point in this case is that the initiative for this very generous amnesty law came mainly from civil society in Acholiland, notably the local churches and religious leaders.[21] It was preceded by an amnesty law (limited to a short period only) in 1987, and by more restricted presidential pardons granted on various earlier occasions (Buckley-Zistel 2008: 79, 159). These amnesties were a vital prerequisite for persuading earlier rebel groups (in Acholiland, West Nile and Teso) to give up their armed struggle. Without an amnesty and the promise that they would not be tried for war crimes and possibly[22] for earlier human rights violations, the leaders of the UNRF II in West Nile, for example, would not have accepted a peace agreement and disarmament (see Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative et al. n.d.; Allen 2006: 72–101; Branch 2011: chapter 6).

However, since 2005 the five top LRA leaders, for whom the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant in that year, have been excluded from protection under the law[23] – at least according to the prevailing legal discourse. This arrest warrant was issued at the request of the Ugandan government. It was the first prominent case brought before the ICC. Some observers who were critical of the government and of (this form of) globalization claimed that this intervention was the main reason why the amnesty law failed to achieve its original goal – to pave the way for a peace agreement with Joseph Kony. It is not easy to say whether the arrest warrant upset the peace negotiations and led to their failure, or whether it rather stimulated them and speeded them up on the part of the LRA leaders (see Allen/Vlassenroot 2010b: 16f.; Allen 2006: 126; Atkinson 2010a: 310; n. 52; Brubacher 2010; Quinn 2013). Tim Allen and Koen Vlassenroot, two well-known experts on this region of Africa and its history, argue that the intervention by the ICC was one

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[19] For details, and on post-war developments in West Nile generally, see Bogner/Neubert 2016, 2013b, 2012, 2013a; Bogner/Rosenthal 2014; Mischnick/Bauer 2009; Bauer 2013: 173–180, 2009; Refugee Law Project 2004.

[20] See Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative et al., n.d.; Amnesty Commission 2009.

[21] They sought to facilitate a negotiated settlement between the government and the LRA and to assist the surrender or desertion of LRA fighters or their 'reintegration', not least with a view to reintegrating the thousands of former child soldiers and abductees in Acholiland; see Amnesty Commission 2009; Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative et al. n.d.; Allen 2006; Quinn 2013.

[22] Formally, the amnesty law of 2000, like earlier amnesties, did not cover human rights violations committed by state officials or those committed prior to an armed rebellion, but in political practice there was a strong tendency to understand it that way (Rice 2009: 137, 234).

[23] Of these five, only Kony and Dominic Ongwen are still alive today. Ongwen was arrested in 2015 and handed over to the ICC. On the heated debate in the local 'civil society', in humanitarian organizations, and among scholars concerning the so-called 'intervention' of the ICC, see Allen 2006: esp. chs. 4 and 5.

of the reasons why the violence and the activity of the LRA subsided in northern Uganda after 2005 (Allen/Vlassenroot 2010b: 15f.). However, it did not put an end to the rebel organization, which shifted its presence to the west, to the environs of Garamba National Park (in the DR Congo), and at the time of writing, so it seems, has moved close to the most western part of the border between Sudan and South Sudan.

Another decisive factor in this development, as mentioned above, was a change in the situation of the parties in the Sudanese civil war, which led to a peace agreement in 2005 between the government of Sudan and the South Sudanese rebels, and ultimately to the formal independence of South Sudan. Previous to this, in 2002, an agreement had been concluded between the governments of Sudan and Uganda in connection with the fight against the LRA (e.g. Atkinson 2010b: 206–208). In accordance with this agreement, the government in Khartoum officially ceased its support for the Ugandan rebel groups, and agreed to hand over deserters from such groups or escaped abductees to humanitarian organizations or to the Ugandan government (which would allow them to take advantage of the amnesty) (ibid.). This decisively weakened the military strength of the remaining north Ugandan rebel groups and was one important reason for the peace agreement between Kampala and UNRF II in West Nile. These developments (including this peace treaty with the last remaining rebel group in West Nile) were important reasons why the LRA leaders contacted the Ugandan government in 2003, and took part in official negotiations from 2006 to 2008.[24]

2.4   The "time of peace"

When, in 2006, after about 27 years[25] of civil war in northern Uganda (including the civil-war-like events in West Nile), the LRA withdrew from Ugandan territory, several years passed before the civilian population in Acholiland began to feel relatively safe from renewed attacks by the rebel group. Most (though not all) of those who were living in the so-called protected villages set up by the government returned to their homes and gradually began to lead an ordered and "peaceful" (or rather: less violent) life again. Many families are still uncertain to this day whether their children who were abducted during the war are still alive, and where they are. Many Acholi,

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[24] For a condensed yet detailed account of the negotiations between the government and the LRA, see esp. Atkinson 2010a; also Podzun 2011: ch. 5.1.

[25] Contrary to the now customary ordering of historical events in Uganda in the hegemonic discourse, this periodization includes the armed conflicts which took place in West Nile, Amin's home region, after the end of his regime, in 1979 and the early 1980s. The failure to give enough attention to these events in West Nile, and the general marginalization of this specific chapter in the history of the civil war before 1986, reflects the Acholi-centeredness of the "counter discourse" which has become dominant among "critical" intellectuals.

especially those who lived in villages and in the camps, look back on years of extreme suffering. They have experienced attacks on their villages, cruel murders of civilians by rebels (and, especially in the earlier phases of the fighting in Acholiland, murders and also massacres by government forces). To this must be added the loss of hundreds of thousands of cattle – whether stolen by cattle thieves or plundered or confiscated by government soldiers – which in this rural socioeconomic setting is a huge set-back with far-reaching consequences. This is a severe loss because livestock, and especially cattle, have always been used to pay 'bridewealth', and until recently were the equivalent of possessing a bank account. Many civilians have survived abduction by the rebels, even if they were only kept captive for a short time. According to the available data provided by quantitative studies, about 40% of the male inhabitants of Acholiland who were born between 1976 and 1992 were abducted, whether for a long or a short period (Blattman/Annan 2010: 133f.).

Thus, it is important to realize that many members of the civilian population in Acholiland and neighboring parts of northern Uganda have been traumatized, and not only the returned child soldiers. The LRA rebels came from Acholiland, and their warlike activities and attacks were mainly focused on the area inhabited by their own people, but neighboring areas, especially the former districts of Lango, Teso and West Nile (including Adjumani) were also directly affected.

3 Closeness and distance: Civilians and ex-rebels from the Lord's Resistance Army

Artur Bogner, Gabriele Rosenthal & Katharina Teutenberg

3.1 Introduction: The blocked dialogue between civilians and ex-rebels

In June 2017 Artur Bogner and Gabriele Rosenthal conducted a workshop in Gulu (northern Uganda) which brought together civilians and ex-rebels from the Lord's Resistance Army. "What prevented you from escaping?" This question was put by a civilian, a farmer from a village in Acholiland, to the six male and female former child soldiers who were present (in general, women or girls who were abducted by the LRA were also trained as fighters). This demand to know why they had not run away from the LRA earlier was obviously prompted by the answers given to a previous question. A civilian woman had asked them to say explicitly how long they had stayed in the "bush", as it is called in Uganda. The answers ranged from four to sixteen years. Less well-informed readers might think that these questions and the insinuated reproach easily suggest themselves. One would think, for instance, in view of the fact that membership was generally not voluntary, that in the course of a period of up to sixteen years there must have been opportunities to escape from the LRA, especially in the later years when the young rebels were no longer adolescents. Moreover, the civilians had many times seen the return of civilians who had been made to carry loads or perform other tasks for a short time, but who had then not stayed in the hands of the rebels, as well as that of people who had been forcibly

recruited by the rebel army at an age above fourteen and who had been able to escape relatively soon afterward.

However, this question is less natural if we consider the fact that the man who put it had probably experienced the cruel and bloody attacks committed by the LRA on villages in his area, with the violent abduction of children and adolescents, and, like the other five civilian men and women present, probably knew how dangerous escaping or "deserting" was for the escapees and for their families, since they had repeatedly been told of the gory revenge the rebels would take should they try to escape (see also Hollander 2010: 34). An ex-rebel whom we will call Isabelle[1] answered the question by saying that when they were no longer in Uganda, but for example in the DR Congo, it would have been impossible to find the way back alone. And then Maria, who, like Isabelle, had been forced to marry a member of the LRA and had come back with a son[2], said that she had been shot in the leg and was unable to walk for a long time. This made the idea of escaping completely unthinkable for her, she said.

Throughout these question-and-answer sessions, which were initiated by Artur Bogner and Gabriele Rosenthal, both sides seem to be making subtle reproaches that are not spoken out loud. While on the manifest level the civilians try to show understanding for the ex-rebels, between the lines there are suspicions and accusations that cannot fail to be heard. The most obvious feature of this exchange is that the ex-rebels always try to justify their actions. For example, another civilian, a woman, asks whether they told their parents what they have said in small groups in the workshop concerning their time with the LRA. Isabelle, who went to live in the town because of the discrimination suffered by her children in the village, first answers, with a slightly aggressive undertone, that after returning she could not talk to her parents about her time in the "bush", and then she says:

> "I couldn't tell my mother, because when I came back, several neighbors were coming with several other things to my mother, they even asked her, 'you can sit, you can sleep with your daughter in the same house, she can even turn and kill you'. And my mother became so afraid of me that I could even kill her, that is why I became so humble, I will not tell her **anything** of what happened in the bush."[3]

One of the questions put by the ex-rebels to the civilians shows how much they feel they are being accused unjustly. They repeatedly ask the civilians whether they accept

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[1] Names and other personal details have been anonymized or altered for reasons of data protection. In particular, we use pseudonyms when discussing the biographies of the ex-rebels in this and the following chapter.

[2] See ch. 4 for a detailed discussion of her biography.

[3] All quotations from the workshop were translated from Luo into English by George Ochan, our field assistant, and we have not corrected them. See appendix for transcription symbols.

that they were abducted, and had neither gone with the rebels, nor stayed with them, voluntarily. The first answer to the question "Do you really accept that we were just abducted?" is given by a teacher from Gulu with a university degree. He says, "I do agree that most of you were abducted." The civilians then spend some time putting forward arguments to the effect that this might be true for those ex-rebels who are *present*; but it is not true for those who began the rebellion. Here, the arguments presented by the villagers, most of whom have received little school education, are basically the same as those formulated by the town-dwellers who have been to college or university[4]; but with the difference that the villagers – although they are about the same age as the "returnees" – speak as if they are in the position of parents. Thus, a woman from the village begins her statement as follows: "My brothers and sisters, but mainly my children", and then explains that it had not been the wish of the "returnees" to go into the "bush". Nevertheless, there is still a suggestion in the air that they could have left the rebel army earlier. A question put by David, who was with the LRA for sixteen years, indirectly expresses his doubts whether the civilians really believe that they were forcibly abducted:

> "I heard that you appreciate that we were just abducted so this brings me to the question that if you really agree and accept that we were just abducted, why don't you tell others, who are like you, to understand us that we were just abducted?"

Artur Bogner and Gabriele Rosenthal spent a total of about twelve months in northern Uganda – including around five months in Acholiland – in which they carried out field research together, conducting many interviews with former child soldiers or ex-rebels, members of their families and other civilians. Despite this, we were rather surprised at these questions that were put by both of the two groupings. Although we were aware that a dialogue between these two groupings would not be easy, due to the discrimination experienced by the ex-rebels, their repressed aggression, and their feelings of resentment toward the civilians, and although we had reflected on the psychological and socio-structural problems that the dialogue would entail, we were nevertheless surprised at the reproaches that were formulated more or less explicitly. We had not expected that these questions would still be asked around eleven years after the LRA had moved out of Uganda, and that they would still appear to be so pressing. Like ourselves, the people who participated in this workshop, which had been initiated by us and our field assistant, were also surprised how new, or relatively new, such a discussion of past experiences was for everyone in the group. They realized that they had never had such intensive discussions with

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[4] The three civilians from the village are all farmers or smallholders; like most of the "returnees", they have had a maximum of four years primary education and speak no English. The three civilians from the town have all been to university and speak very good English (in some cases better than Luo, the predominant local language); two of them work as teachers and one works for an international human rights organization.

members of the other grouping. The astonishing fact is that these findings are possible despite the discourses conducted by local "civil society organizations", members of the government, churches, and local politicians. These discourses seek reconciliation between civilians and former rebel soldiers or child soldiers; and discussion groups have been organized in certain contexts for this purpose, for example by local churches. The local discourses of civilians and their (opinion) leaders frequently underline the importance of the traditional culture of reconciliation between perpetrators and victims among the Acholi, which they say is superior to "Western" or "modern" forms of punitive justice or conflict management. They argue that the purpose of this traditional approach to dealing with crime and violence is to reconstruct social relations or restore the upset balance between the individuals and groups involved. This reconstruction is said to take place on the basis of the traditional 'collectivist' values of the Acholi, which serve to strengthen the community, and which can (or should) be realized through negotiations, compensation and various forms of reparation between the conflict parties. They argue that the Western form of justice, by contrast, is mainly concerned with restoring the disturbed social order by *punishing* the perpetrators.[5]

The questions put by civilians during the workshop are also surprising because in the interviews we conducted with civilians, especially those living in villages, one thing was very clear: most of them had themselves witnessed attacks by the LRA on compounds in their villages, or on civilians in the camps set up by the government, with brutal and bloody abductions and the murder of relatives of returned rebels. Some of them had been abducted for a short time themselves, to work as porters for instance, and then been set free by the rebels. Many of them know, or have seen for themselves, that the commanders forced children very soon after their abduction to kill other abducted children, members of their own families, or other rebels or abductees who had escaped and been recaptured, and that any attempt to return to their families of origin was equivalent to risking their lives because of the LRA's open threats that they would take revenge, which were indeed often put into practice.

The implied reproach in the question why the former child soldiers had not run away earlier from the rebel group, is an indication of how little the civilians have been able to consider the perspective of those who were abducted as children, how little they are able or willing to appreciate – on an emotional level – what it means to be taken forcibly away from one's family as a child, often under terrifying circumstances, and to be forced to kill or torture others, to be constantly in fear of one's life, and to survive in the "bush" under extremely hard conditions. We can assume

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[5] Here, they refer to an undifferentiated stereotype of "Western" justice and fail to see, for example, the extent to which long-term processes in respect of reforming the penal system, that take the need for "resocialization" into account, have become dominant in the Western world during the past seventy years.

that adopting the perspective of the abducted children and adolescents ("role tak-ing") is still much too threatening or distressing for most civilians. Refusing to adopt this perspective goes together with avoiding becoming involved in emotionally and communicatively close, or emotionally intense, encounters with the returned rebels and their horrifying experiences. We conclude on the basis of our empirical analyses that this is due on the one hand to their own terrible suffering, their own fears of being mutilated, murdered or abducted, their experiences of the way the LRA went around attacking, plundering, abducting and killing during the civil war in this region between 1986 and 2006, and on the other hand to repressed feelings of guilt because they were not abducted and were not the ones who suffered in the "bush"[6] – or because they failed to prevent the abductions, or even identified themselves with the goals, and perhaps to some extent with the methods, of the LRA rebels.

As we will show with the aid of our empirical material, there have been relatively few attempts by members of the two groupings to meet on a basis of mutual respect and engage with each other's suffering. And this despite the fact that in public and political discourses, and especially in the mass media, it has repeatedly been under-lined that the Acholi have a traditional culture of reconciliation, that former child soldiers are covered by the government's amnesty law, and that this is generally felt to be right. While the ex-rebels repeatedly experience discrimination in their every-day lives, both from their families and neighbors and in their wider environment, the relations or figurations between non-abducted civilians and returned child sol-diers appear to be peaceful, but emotionally distant. This makes it easier to under-stand why the former rebels in our workshop countered with questions such as whether the civilians accept that they were abducted, in other words recruited by force. This implies another question: whether the former child soldiers were at least partly responsible for their abduction and for the violent acts they committed while they were with the LRA. In striking contrast to this, the possibility of attributing responsibility to those adults who were present when the children were abducted was almost never thematized by the people we talked to, either in this workshop or in the interviews. In the local discourses, there is no thematization at all of the idea that the civilian population might also be in some way responsible for the abduction and forced recruitment of children and adolescents by a rebel group that originated in this very population. In the interviews we conducted, there are only two excep-tions to this rule, which we will return to below (chapter 3.6).

We will begin with an explanation of the methods used for this study, before proceeding to a discussion of how the ex-rebels we interviewed described their ex-periences with civilians, and what we were able to observe in family interviews. We will contrast these findings with what civilians said who were not abducted at all, or

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[6] We can assume that some of the civilians suffer from feelings of guilt because they were not held captive for long periods and were able to survive. We can talk of a condition that has been referred to as "survivor guilt" in research on survivors of the Holocaust and their descendants (see Niederland 1980: 232).

only for a short time. Finally, we will discuss the above-mentioned workshop in more detail and show that the dialogue between the "ex-rebels" and the civilians on their very different experiences of the past has hardly begun, and that pressing for a quick reconciliation will only hinder the opening of this dialogue.

3.2   Research questions and study design

The aim of the research project entitled "Child soldiers in context. Biographies, familial and collective trajectories in northern Uganda", funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), which was carried out between March 2014 and November 2017 under the direction of Dieter Neubert, was to reconstruct the biographies and reintegration processes of former child soldiers who had been abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army, and their interrelations with family biographies and the local history of war in this part of northern Uganda. We have tried to understand and explain the biographical self-thematizations of the former child soldiers in terms of their embedment in the contexts of their family histories and the local history of their region. The methodological design of the study was based on the principles of sociological biographical research, with an added family-history dimension, which is becoming increasingly important in this kind of research. We used a combination of individual interviews, family interviews, group discussions, participant observation, and analysis of material from the mass media (see Rosenthal 2016). Our main focus was on narrative interviews with former child soldiers and members of their families, in which we asked them to tell us their life stories and their family histories. This method of collecting data was tested in a pilot study in this and in the neighboring region in 2011/2012 (see Bogner/Rosenthal 2017, 2014; chapter 5 in this volume). Most of the interviewees found it fairly easy to engage in long biographical narrations.[7] Interviews with other local informants, including members of non-governmental and governmental organizations offering services for former child soldiers, also provided data for the study. On the basis of this data, it was possible to reconstruct family histories, and how families interpret their history, as well as the significance of intergenerational relations and processes for the life courses and biographical (self-)thematizations of the former child soldiers (see Bogner/Rosenthal/Schmiereck in this volume). Thus, it was possible to combine biographical case reconstructions of individuals or families with analyses of intra- and extrafamilial discourses.

The material collected by Artur Bogner and Gabriele Rosenthal between 2011 and 2017 in the course of five field trips to northern Uganda, especially Acholiland (during four of which they worked together, including two trips that each lasted for two months)[8] is mainly based on biographical narrative interviews with 17 former

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[7] Some scholars have doubted if this is possible in non-European contexts (e.g. Matthes 1985).

[8] Some interviews with key actors and observers of the armed conflict and the de-escalation process in Acholiland, and with former child soldiers who had returned home, were carried out during short visits

child soldiers and 32 of their relatives, each of which was spread over two to five meetings. The interviewees were invited to speak freely about their own life and the history of their family, without any restrictions (see Rosenthal 2018: chapter 5; Schuetze 1983). As far as possible, the initial presentation or narration that followed this invitation was not interrupted by asking questions, but was accompanied by paraverbal utterances such as "mm". If the person paused, they were encouraged to continue, for instance by asking "And so what happened then?", or by making eye contact, or signaling interest in some other way. When the person indicated that they had finished, we referred to particular experiences or certain phases of their biography that they had mentioned and asked if they could tell us more about them. In the third part of the interview, so-called narrative-external questions were asked, concerning topics that had not been mentioned by the interviewee. This concentration on eliciting narrations results from our experience that inviting someone to narrate their life story and focusing initially on topics which they have introduced, supports a process in which the interviewee is increasingly able to engage in a narrative flow that reflects his or her own relevances. This helps to stimulate memory processes, and in most cases, provided the interview goes relatively smoothly, any initial tendency to be guided by what are considered to be the interests, topics, questions or opinions of the interviewers will increasingly become weaker.

The rest of the data was also collected largely by means of narrative interviews. Altogether, we held twelve thematically focused narrative interviews with civilians and experts, nine group discussions (six with former child soldiers and three with inhabitants of Acholiland who had not been abducted), and ten family interviews. In addition, we have recordings of the above-mentioned two-day workshop which have been transcribed. Most of the interviews were conducted in Luo with the aid of a research assistant and translated in short sequences during the interview.

In addition to discourse analyses of material from the print media, we focused primarily on making detailed case reconstructions, both on the level of individual biographies and on the level of the family (Rosenthal 1995, 2018: chapter 5). Additional data were also analyzed using a sequential and reconstructive method (Reichertz 1986; Rosenthal 2018). A text analysis perspective also played a role in our analysis of the material, in which we sequenced the transcripts according to the criterion of the textual sorts used (see Rosenthal 2018: chapter 6). This means that when carrying out an analysis, we try to reconstruct what it might mean when a speaker narrates an event, uses it to present an argument, or describes it (see Kallmeyer/Schuetze 1977).

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to Gulu in 2009, 2011 and 2012, as part of our previous project which was focused on the reintegration of ex-rebels from other rebel groups in the neighboring region of West Nile. However, most of the interviews in Acholiland, especially the family and group interviews, were conducted by Bogner and Rosenthal between November 2014 and July 2017 in the course of three periods of joint field research.

Because our focus in this chapter is on family interviews, group discussions and the workshop, it is necessary to make a few remarks about how this data was collected. In contrast to other research contexts, in which group discussions often occurred spontaneously, and were not planned, either in terms of the composition of the group or in terms of how to conduct the discussion (e.g. Rosenthal/Bahl/Worm 2017), in this context, we thought very carefully about who should be included in the group and what interview method we should use. Thus, we set up groups composed of former child soldiers with whom we had already conducted individual interviews (see chapter 5), but also two group discussions with female abductees, and two discussions with men who had been abducted, of whom we had already met only one or two before the group discussion. We decided to interview women and men in separate groups in order to be able to observe gender-specific differences. In group discussions with civilians, we deliberately put people with a (relatively) good education in one group, and others who had never been to school or only for a short time in another group. This was not only because we have generally found that "educated" people prefer to talk to us in English, but also because we wanted to observe the influence of what we will refer to as the "NGO discourse" on the way they talked. Moreover, we wanted to avoid those difficulties which we knew would arise as a result of the considerable power inequalities between well-educated and largely unschooled people (the latter being mainly villagers). We knew from experience that, when they are together with people who had less access to education, the former will almost invariably openly stress the fact that they are better qualified. With their desire to communicate with us in English, they tend to exclude all those who have not had much schooling.

The discussions with former rebels, which hardly needed any further intervention because they proceeded almost automatically after the first round of introductions, were about the stories they told of their time in the LRA and their return to civilian life. In almost all these discussions, the initial phase in which the participants introduced themselves and told the others how they had been abducted, what their life in the LRA was like, and what happened when they returned home, took up more than half the time. Discussions with people who had not been abducted proceeded rather differently. They were asked to introduce themselves and then to tell us about their experiences with returned former child soldiers. Especially the group discussion with "civilians" who had received tertiary education needed far more interventions by the researchers in the form of encouraging people to tell stories, since, much more than in the case of the former rebels, these people tended to present arguments rather than engage in narrations of their encounters or concrete experiences with "returnees".

We will discuss these findings in more detail below.

For family interviews, we considered beforehand who should participate and we steered the discussion in certain directions, with the exception of family dialogues that sometimes took place spontaneously in the course of individual interviews, due to the presence of other members of the family during the interview. These planned

interviews were conducted with the aid of a field assistant by Gabriele Rosenthal, who is trained in conducting client-centered interviews and family counselling. Of course we had no absolute control over who actually turned up for the interview, but we invited people on the basis of our case reconstructions of the biographies of the ex-rebels, with two main criteria in mind: who would this particular returnee like to talk to, and what combination of people would be justified from a psychodynamic point of view in the light of the history of conflicts within the family. However, any attempt on our part to adhere strictly to our plan for the interview – for instance who should take part or what topics should be discussed – would have made it too coercive (since the interviewees would have had difficulty understanding our intentions).

The workshop, which we had not originally planned to hold, was based on our analysis of the data we had collected, especially the family interviews which made clear how helpful assistance from third parties can be in the dialogue between ex-rebels and civilians. Our aim was to give the participants an insight into our empirical results and to discuss these with them. We wanted to focus on the discourses relating to what we were told was a traditional local culture of reconciliation, in contrast to what we had heard about the way former child soldiers were discriminated against in everyday life. At the same time, we wanted to encourage civilians and former child soldiers to engage in a mutual discussion of how they had experienced the civil war, and how they felt about their current everyday relations. Doing this was important to us because it showed that we attached value to communication or dialogue with our interviewees, and to their lay or everyday knowledge, and were not only interested in using them (unilaterally) as a source of data or knowledge for our own purposes.[9]

This two-day workshop was conducted by Artur Bogner and Gabriele Rosenthal with the assistance of George Ochan. The invited participants were six civilians (three villagers, who have not been to school or only for a very short time, and three town dwellers who had been to school and college or university) and six former rebels who had returned from the "bush". The language of communication during the workshop was Luo. In the plenary discussions, George Ochan translated in short sequences what the participants said. In addition, the participants discussed certain topics in twos or in small groups. After everyone had been introduced and we had made a short presentation of our findings, which received a very positive echo, the rest of the workshop was structured as follows:

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[9] Because of global inequalities in respect of access to information and academic knowledge, and to jobs in scientific and educational organizations, scholars from the Global North are in a relationship of inequality with the people they study in the Global South, which also has an economic aspect. Thus, people who live in the Global North are generally in a far better position to draw economic benefits from the advancement of scientific knowledge.

— In pairs each consisting of a former child soldier and a civilian, the former child soldier told the civilian about the difficulties he or she had experienced in the "bush".

— Plenary discussion.

— Again in pairs, a civilian told a former child soldier about the difficulties he or she had experienced during the civil war.

— Plenary discussion.

— In small groups consisting of either all civilians or all former child soldiers, the participants discussed what they would like to ask people in the other category.

— Plenary discussion – each grouping could ask a question which was answered by the other grouping.

3.3   Special features of the biographical self-presentations of former child soldiers[10]

We will begin by focusing on the biographical self-presentations of former child soldiers. Our analysis of both individual and group interviews revealed some very characteristic and almost universal features:

a)   The ex-rebels engage in detailed *narrations* of various **experiences** they had during their time with the **LRA**, and in concrete **accounts of their abduction**, and, immediately after it, the murder of fellow captives who tried to flee, which they witnessed or were forced to commit. In these stories of how they were abducted, it is striking that they never complain that no adults came to their aid, or even suggest that this might have been possible. However, this is not to say that the abductees did not experience the situation as one in which they felt exposed to the aggression of the attacking rebels without any kind of help or support. This detailed narration, with hypermnesic memories of certain very bad experiences at the beginning of a phase of extreme traumatization[11], can be explained by the

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[10] All the interviews cited here were conducted in Luo and translated into English by one of our field assistants, G. Okello or G. Ochan. We do not quote the original utterances that were spoken and transcribed in Luo, but G. Okello's and G. Ochan's (uncorrected) written English translations.

[11] We use the term 'extreme traumatization' in distinction to traumatization caused by a single traumatizing event or a short traumatizing period of time (see Grubrich-Simitis 1979), to which people in Acholiland have been, and still are, repeatedly exposed. The concept of an extreme situation was introduced by Bruno Bettelheim (1979) in connection with his own experiences in a Nazi concentration camp. He laid emphasis in particular on the inability to escape from a state of captivity, ignorance of how long it would last, and being in permanent danger of one's life. Niederland (1980: 10) suggests that one of the essential conditions of extreme traumatization is "living with the permanent threat of a

brutal invasion of the everyday life of these young people, an event which rup-
tured their "earlier life line", and led to dramatic differences between their life
before it happened and their life after it happened (see Niederland 1980: 229).
We believe that these narrations also have the function of demonstrating that
they were powerless in this situation and were abducted against their will. At
least in the interviews with us, or in our presence, the former child soldiers ob-
viously felt they needed to emphasize and plausibilize that they did not join the
LRA voluntarily and did not stay in the "bush" voluntarily.

b)   Almost universally, when they mention their age, a particular year, or how long
     a certain phase or event lasted, these are estimates which are usually inconsistent
     and change over the years. Thus in our analysis of the interviews, we usually
     found inconsistencies in respect of the age at which people were abducted, the
     length of time they stayed with the LRA, their age on returning from the "bush",
     or how much time has passed since their return.[12] First, this can be explained by
     the low degree of penetration by government authorities in the rural areas of
     northern Uganda, where often no one checks whether births are registered or
     whether children go to school, for example. It cannot be generally expected that
     people in this region attach importance to measuring time by the written calen-
     dar. In addition, we can also assume that many traumatized ex-rebels have an
     altered sense of time, especially in respect of how long they stayed with the LRA.
     This can be seen in the case of Lydia, who often names exact times in the inter-
     views which turn out to be contradictory. This was very obvious in connection
     with the age of her third child. G. Rosenthal talked to her during her pregnancy,
     one year after the birth of the child, and after another year. Yet during this third
     meeting, Lydia declared that her child was only one year old.

c)   The former child soldiers *narrate* **public situations or situations at work** in
     which they suffer **discrimination** and are made to feel like outsiders in their
     particular we-group or environment. Some of them say that they had to learn
     that their past life in the "bush" is a stigma which they need to keep secret. Some

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disaster that is initially nameless and not understood, but which gradually draws nearer and nearer"
(our translation).

[12] The interviewees often mention which class they were in when they were abducted, but this only
allows us to calculate their minimum age at the time, because it is common for children to stop attend-
ing school for long periods and then to resume again. The date of return from the "bush" recorded on
the certificates that were issued to returnees is usually reliable. However, it must be noted that because
they were afraid (presumably of the LRA), many did not register, or only long after their return. Since
the ex-rebels presented in this chapter told detailed stories about their return, and about the time they
spent in reception centers, the date they mention for their return is probably accurate.

of them have left their families in the village for this reason and moved to the town.

d) They *narrate* situations in which they have suffered **discrimination in their families of origin** – though mostly only after prompting by the interviewers – and *argue* that they are in a weak and marginalized position in their families and in their village or community. In some cases, they speak of being not allowed to return to the compounds of their families. In this context, they often also say that in the right circumstances they would be prepared to go back to the "bush" – for instance if the husband they had been forced to marry or the commander who had been responsible for them were still alive. However, they usually do not point to anyone as being responsible for the stigmatization and discrimination they have experienced: neither their families nor other civilians, nor the government, and certainly not the LRA leaders. We assume that the ex-rebels have internalized the view of the LRA leaders that it was necessary to recruit minors because the adult Acholi had let the rebels down. Thus, they believe that the abductions were inevitable.

e) They present *arguments* to justify the time they spent with the LRA. These arguments also show how much it irritates them when people suggest that they stayed with the LRA voluntarily. One ex-rebel said in an ironic tone: "I didn't apply to join the LRA". They justify having stayed so long mainly with the argument that any attempt to escape would probably have ended with being recaptured and then brutally tortured and killed. In order to prove they are telling the truth, they recount very detailed and grisly stories of what happened to others who tried to escape.

Detailed accounts of how the children were abducted. Lydia[13] was born between 1989 and 1991. Her narration of how she was abducted in May 2003[14] shows very graphically how utterly helpless the children felt, and how traumatizing the events were that they experienced in the days following their abduction. In addition,

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[13] Lydia was interviewed by Gabriele Rosenthal in December 2014 and December 2015. In addition, G. Rosenthal conducted interviews with Lydia's mother (December 2015), her elder sister (January 2015), and her two younger brothers (December 2015 and January 2016). All these interviews were arranged by Lydia. Besides herself, other family members were also present, so that the second part of the interview was conducted by G. Rosenthal in the form of a family interview. Lydia also took part in a group discussion with three ex-rebels in January 2015 (see ch. 5) and in the workshop in June 2017.

[14] We were able to establish this date of 2003 because the attack on this school was reported in the daily papers. Lydia had said 2001, that she was twelve years old at the time, and that she was born in 1989. We conclude either that she was born later, or that she was older than twelve in 2003. It is possible that she pretended she was younger after being abducted, for instance in order to avoid being forced to marry.

there is an issue that is clearly co-present in the narration, although it is not spoken out loud, namely that none of the adult members of the village community who were present could protect the children, or even tried to protect them, from the attackers. Since we interviewed not only Lydia, but also her mother, her older sister Sara, and her two younger brothers Timmy and Sven, and since all these people gave us detailed accounts of Lydia's abduction, it is worth taking a closer look at these accounts. All of them say that they had sought shelter in the village school together with other villagers, relatives, and children. Lydia says that the rebels invaded the school building and ordered some of the children to go with them, including herself and her girl cousin. Let us first consider the following passage in Lydia's initial narration, which we can then contrast with certain details which she mentioned only later, after being prompted by the interviewer:

> "when they ((LRA)) reached, they began dismantling the school gate, we could hear the sound ((gate dismantling noise)) and bombs from our makeshift, there were only three soldiers guarding the seminary, they entered and abducted several students. When the Buffalo ((armored military vehicle)) came and began firing at the rebels, they ran came and got us in our hideout and they took me and a daughter of uncle ((father's brother)). Then we started walking with them."

While she gives very few details here concerning the circumstances of the abduction, Lydia follows this passage with a very detailed account of how on the very first day she was forced to participate in the murder of children who were abducted from the same school. After traveling on foot with the rebels for some time, they were asked if anyone wanted to rest, and:

> "one of the pupils responded that himself. The rebels responded that they wanted to show how people can rest. He was made to lie flat back facing up and we were ordered to pass while stepping on him. When we walked and reached under a mango tree, they again asked who else wanted to rest. Every abductee began sighting at each other's face because the boy who said he had wanted to rest had been killed."

After this boy had been trampled to death, they were made to beat another fellow captive with a stick until he also died. Lydia was then ordered to carry the dead boy's brain on a spade.

In view of these traumatic events, it seems unnecessary to ask why any attempt to escape was unthinkable. But why does Lydia say so little about the situation in the school and how she was separated from her mother and her siblings? If we examine Lydia's story of her abduction in the light of the stories told by her siblings and her mother, it is clear that there must be something here that is painful for Lydia, something about which she is probably unable to speak. Her mother was able to save her siblings from being abducted by offering to let the attackers take Lydia.

When, in the questioning part of the interview, the interviewer asks Lydia whether she could say more about what happened when she was abducted, the first thing she says is that her sister, who is three years older than herself, and her two younger brothers, who were about eleven and six at the time, were present. The rebels had ordered all the children to stand up, but thanks to the intervention of her mother, they only took her away. At first, Lydia only speaks of "other siblings":

> "other siblings were there but my mother cried to the rebels that don't arrest all of them. My mother said please do not abduct all, leave me at least one."

She says that she was chosen because her brothers were so young. In this sequence, she does not mention her sister at all. Timmy, the older of Lydia's two brothers, who gives an impressive account in the interview of the situation in which his sister was abducted, and of how his mother intervened, says that his mother laid herself over the eldest sister, Sara. However, Sara herself says that a very fat woman had lain over her and thus protected her. We learn from the younger brother, Sven, how dramatic the situation was. He can also remember clearly what happened that day. He says that the rebels were shooting wildly, and he wanted to stand up to see what was going on but his mother pulled him down. Then a rebel had seized his arm and made him stand up and his mother had screamed: "don't take him, he's too young"; the rebel had wanted to shoot his mother and had been stopped in time by the commander. But the boy who was standing next to him was shot in the head and some of his brain landed on Sven. Sven says that later, when they went back to their house, he could still smell it and had been unable to eat the food prepared by his mother.

How does the mother recount what happened? She begins by saying: "And this one ((the mother points to Lydia)) was then abducted, when she was very young". In Lydia's presence, the mother recounts how she was able to save her two sons from being abducted, showing how proud she was of her own courage. She does not mention the elder daughter at this point, and introduces Lydia as her eldest daughter. She thus avoids mentioning in the interview that Sara had a different father, that she was already pregnant when she was married to Lydia's father. We were told this by both Sara and Lydia, who say in their interviews that Sara was not accepted as a daughter in the compound of Lydia's father.

During the interview with her mother, Lydia sat beside the interviewer and when her mother told the story of her abduction, she moved closer to the interviewer. During almost the whole of the interview, Lydia made eye contact only with the interviewer. Because the latter could sense that Lydia was stiffening up, she asked: "How does hearing this make you feel?" Lydia answered: "It makes me feel afraid". Our analysis of this interview, which we will return to, shows that this fear, or the emotion felt by Lydia during the interview with her mother, is not just due to being reminded of her abduction, but also to the feeling that she was rejected by her mother. What is clear is that Lydia cannot question her mother's behavior, either in that past situation or in the present of the interview. In this interview, which toward

the end also included those relatives of the mother who were present, it is striking that the most important topic is whether or not Lydia is "guilty". Thus, the participants mutually assure each other that "nobody" was killed by Lydia (which, in accordance with the dominant discourses, relates only to other rebels or civilians, and not, for instance, to captured government soldiers).

Stories of discrimination in public life and in the family. Whether in individual interviews with former child soldiers, or in group discussions with them, they always mention that they feel discriminated against in their nuclear and extended families, in their village communities, in the town, and in their workplaces. The women in particular tell how their children – especially those who were born in the "bush" – suffer from taunts and even physical violence. These taunts include calling the children by the name "Kony". Ivonne, who returned from the "bush" with a girl and a boy after six years, talks about this problem:

> "In our place there were no people who returned with children from the bush. Thus people would always say let us go and see the children of Kony whether they look like human beings. My mother would always close the children inside to avoid the sight of the crowd. My boy used to play with fellow children but every time they kept calling him 'Kony from the bush'."[15]

Ivonne reacted to this situation by moving to Gulu with her two children, far away from her parents' village. Lydia, whose children were born after she returned from the "bush", also says that she and her children are constantly mocked by members of her husband's family because of her past with the LRA. Lydia, who managed to escape after four years, following forced marriage with an LRA leader and severe physical violence, married again after her return. In 2014, when she was pregnant with her third child, her second husband, who was an alcoholic and prone to violence, discovered that she had been with the LRA and drove her out of his family's compound. She now lives near Gulu in the compound of her father's family. Her father died when she was very young, and her mother is now married to his brother. Since discovering that Lydia had been with the LRA, her husband has lived and worked in Kampala and avoids contact with Lydia and his children. In other words, Lydia had at first said nothing about her past and tried to keep it secret. After it was revealed, her husband's family also began to treat her differently. Like her husband, his relatives accused Lydia of being possessed by harmful spirits. The same accusations were made in the compound of her deceased father. She tries to defend herself against these accusations, and what she feels to be unjust discrimination, which now also affects her children. It is a stigma which she tries to hide, especially outside the

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[15] This quotation is from a group discussion with ex-rebels led by Artur Bogner in December 2015.

family. When the interviewer invited her to say more about the way she feels discriminated against, she said that if her first husband in the "bush" were still alive, she would probably have gone back to him long ago.

Most of our interviewees told us that people, even in their own families, believed they were possessed. Maria, who was abducted when she was eleven, says, for instance, that her grandmother once, when she was drunk, called her Satan's daughter and said it would have been better if she had died in the "bush".

Many returnees also speak of relationships that abruptly ended when their partners, employers, acquaintances or friends discovered that they had been in the "bush". Johann, who was abducted when he was between ten and twelve, says:

> "When my girlfriend learned about my time in the bush she told me you are from the bush you have bad spirit over my head and so on. So she decided we have to separate."

These accusations damage the self-esteem of the ex-rebels so severely because they also believe in harmful spirits, and because they have internalized the ascribed image of a "bush mentality" or "rebel mentality". They struggle in general with a damaged self-image, are troubled day and night by visions of the traumatizing events they have witnessed, and the murders they have committed. Some of them try to deny having taken part in these atrocities, even to themselves, and accept almost without protest an outsider position in their families and in the society of the Acholi or of Acholiland in general. We conclude that they try to avoid weakening their position even more, by accusing nobody and doing their best to integrate themselves in their families and their rural or urban communities. This leads to what appears to be a very split figuration: they subject themselves to the leading "elders" in their village or clan communities and accept their decisions, for instance that they are not allowed to speak at meetings, or have no right to land, while they had learned from Joseph Kony and other commanders that these elders are "impure", "not genuine" or "spoiled" Acholi, with a status similar to that of the undead.

3.4   On the position of former child soldiers in their families and local communities

The weak position of returned child soldiers in their families became very clear not only in interviews with their relatives, but also in the family interviews, at which the ex-rebels were also present. We repeatedly observed a certain alienation between them and members of the family who were not abducted, whose attitude toward them was distanced and respectful, but at the same time expressed an unspoken reproach. With reference to supposed Acholi traditions, they often argued that the ex-rebels had no right to land, and in some cases even refused to let them return to the family compound. The interviews with civilians who were not abducted, or only

for a short time, are dominated by narrations of how they coped with hardships in the past, how they suffered under the LRA, and how difficult the present economic situation is for them. They also fear that their neighbors or other members of the local community might make demands for compensation for murders that they believe were possibly committed by the returned ex-rebels. In several interviews, we were told that relatives living nearby were not happy about the return of these children, because their own children were still missing or believed dead.

Before the backdrop of their own suffering, and especially the fact that they had witnessed with their own eyes the violent acts committed by child soldiers of the LRA during attacks on their compounds or on the camps where most of them had been forced to live, it is possible to understand the emotional distance from, or even fear of, the returned ex-rebels that is expressed by civilians. For us, this explains the clear ambivalence in the attitude of the civilians toward the ex-rebels, i.e. toward their own children. On the one hand, the returnees are treated with a certain degree of respect by their families, but on the other hand, they are often stigmatized and serve as scapegoats for problems in the extended family or village community. One way this respect was manifested was that at all family interviews the returnee sat on a chair, like the interviewer, the field assistant, and the male elder of the clan or relevant subgroup of the clan, while everyone else sat on the ground. While this may be the norm for visitors who do not live in the compound, it nevertheless expresses a certain emotional distance.

Thus, Lydia sat on a bench with the interviewer and Geoffrey Okello, the field assistant, while her mother and other female relatives sat on the ground in front of them. Her mother's older brother, in whose compound she was living at the time of the interview, sat on a chair a short distance away. Other young male relatives were also seated on the ground.

At the time of the interview, Lydia's mother was separated from her second husband, who was an alcoholic and very prone to violence, and had returned to live with her own maternal relatives (Lydia's father had died some years before she was abducted, and her father's brother had "inherited" her mother as a wife and Lydia as a "stepdaughter" under a levirate arrangement). In spring 2017 we heard that she had gone back to her husband. This marital dynamic, which repeats itself in the case of Lydia, shows a pattern in which the wife leaves her husband after episodes of domestic violence, only to return some time later. The second husband of Lydia's mother had repeatedly attacked his wife and Lydia's brothers when he came home drunk, at least in the past. Once, in the presence of the youngest brother, Sven, he had hit Lydia's mother with an axe and nearly killed her. On another occasion, he had knocked out her teeth. The older brother, Timmy, says that he was physically abused by this man when he was a small child. Lydia's mother had several times sought shelter in the compound of her family of origin following such ill-treatment of herself or her children, but each time she had returned after a few years. This compound is about 20 km away from the village and the compound in which Lydia lives with her children and her two brothers. She, too, fears her "stepfather", who,

as tradition demands, sees himself in the legal and ritual position of her father, but, as she explains, does nothing to support her and her children.

Despite the fact that the two compounds are geographically quite close, mother and daughter had not seen each other for several years (Lydia says five years), and only had contact shortly after Lydia's return from the LRA. The visit to her mother, together with the researcher and the field assistant, had been arranged by Lydia of her own volition, but during the journey by car to the compound – whose exact location Lydia did not know – her fear of this meeting with her mother was palpable.

The mother greeted her daughter with demonstrative gestures of pleasure, but in the further course of the meeting the relationship between the two appeared to be frosty. It was striking, for instance, that the mother never addressed her daughter directly, but only spoke of her in the third person. Lydia seemed to feel intimidated, mostly looked down at her own folded hands, had little non-verbal contact with her mother, and tried to keep close to the interviewer. Although Lydia's mother heard about Lydia's extremely precarious economic situation, including the fact that her husband earns money but sends nothing to help Lydia and the children, the interviewer was presented with a big bag of maize cobs at the end of the interview, but Lydia was given nothing.

In a certain way, the daughter who had returned from the "bush" was on trial during this interview – even if she was explicitly "acquitted" because her mother believed that "nobody" had been murdered by her. In other words, if Lydia had killed someone then she would be "guilty". This is very different in the case of Johann[16] (born about 1990). It is known that Johann was forced to kill his own parents. In the four interviews conducted with this family, the former child soldier is more or less explicitly on trial: the question is whether he is guilty. Members of the family said that the spirits had not yet forgiven him, and that they were therefore unable to organize a ritual of reconciliation or (spiritual) cleansing. Johann was abducted in 2000 when he was about ten years old. During an attack on the village of his father's family, he was forced to kill his mother and his father by a hostile commander who was related to his mother's family. For this reason, when he returned in 2007 he could not go back to his father's family, nor to his mother's family, and he lives today in the town. His mother's brother told the interviewer very firmly that responsibility for these murders lay with Johann alone, and not with his commander, who had only given the order. He legitimizes this view by referring to the traditions of the Acholi. Johann's uncle goes even further and justifies the actions of Joseph Kony, who orders everything, by saying that he is a very good man.

The four family interviews conducted in the compound of Johann's mother's family, which are discussed in detail elsewhere (see chapter 4), were proposed and arranged by him. He had hoped in vain for forgiveness, which he had explicitly begged for, and that the family would allow him to live in the compound. In the

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[16] For a detailed discussion of the biographical interview with Johann and the dialogue with his mother's family, see Bogner/Rosenthal/Schmiereck (ch. 4 in this volume).

fourth interview, he was supported in this wish by his grandmother, but his grand-father said he would agree only if the researcher gave them money so that they could build a house for Johann in the compound. Johann's uncle Frank (born in 1962), the oldest brother of his mother and head of the compound, was not present at this interview. He stayed in his house, probably because he was drunk, as our field assistant and also our driver remarked. As a result, the grandfather's idea was considered only as a suggestion, which needed to be accepted by Frank. The researcher did not comment on the suggestion and subsequently the family made no further attempt to contact her. Just a few days after this family interview, Johann himself told her that his friends, who were also ex-rebels, had convinced him that it would be better for him to stay in the town, since his family was only interested in money, he would have no rights in the compound, and he would probably at some point be driven out again.

While the cases of Lydia and Johann clearly show how difficult reintegration in the family of origin can be, we can present the case of another family[17] – at least the nuclear family – which illustrates how well integration can succeed. It is the case of three returned child soldiers and their children: Tom and his wife Laura, who had been forced to marry by the LRA, with their two children who were born in the "bush", and Tom's cousin Nadia. Sigmar, Nadia's father, let them all live in his compound after their return, together with Tom's mother, who was separated from her second husband, and the widowed grandmother. Sigmar is the grandmother's second son, Tom's deceased father being her first-born son. Another son, who is mentally disabled, also lives in Sigmar's compound, with his wife and a child that is also mentally disabled.

Tom was abducted in 1994, when he was probably nine or ten years old. He returned in 2010, after sixteen years in the "bush", because he was "left behind" after being seriously injured during a clash with government soldiers and was unable to kill himself, as he says in answer to a question. In other words, he admits that he identified with the LRA at that time, and had no intention of escaping. His wife, Laura, was able to escape some time later together with the two children. Tom's cousin Nadia was abducted around 2001 at the age of about twelve and managed to escape after about one and a half years. Today she is married to a former child soldier and lives with him and their children in a large village several hours' drive away from

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[17] In Tom's family, Gabriele Rosenthal and Artur Bogner interviewed his wife (December 2015), his older brother (January 2015), his mother (December 2015), his grandmother (January 2015), his father's brother (December 2015), and his female cousin (January 2016). The interviews with his grandmother, his mother and his cousin were held in the compound of his mother's family. Generally, all the interviewed people, as well as several other members of the family, were present, and the individual interviews developed into family interviews. Three biographical interviews were conducted with Tom himself. In addition, he took part in three group discussions with former child soldiers (2015, 2016), and he attended the workshop in 2017. With the exception of the interview with Tom's older brother, all the interviews were conducted in Luo.

her father's compound. She says that they cannot live in her husband's compound because she and her three children would be taunted and bullied there. Her husband's relatives had forbidden all the other children to play with Nadia's children. In light of this situation, her father tries to support her and her children as far as he is able.

In a way, the successful reintegration of these former child soldiers is the continuation of a strand in a family history of forced or voluntary recruitment of the men as soldiers in armed conflicts. Tom's and Nadia's grandfather was recruited by the British army in the Second World War, fought against the Japanese in Burma, and subsequently worked as a warden in a national park during Obote's first government. Tom's father – the eldest son in the compound – became a regular soldier immediately after leaving school and getting married, and served under Obote's first and second governments; during Obote's exile, he was a member of his guerilla force in Tanzania and helped to overthrow Idi Amin. When Museveni seized power in 1986, he was pressurized into joining the "Uganda People's Democratic Army" (UPDA), a rebel group and predecessor of the LRA, and later he also fought as an LRA soldier. In 1987 – several years before Tom was abducted – he was killed in a battle against government soldiers. His wife, Tom's mother, speaks about his death and shows contempt for the government army. She says that Tom's father was a member of the LRA and describes in detail how she contacted Joseph Kony to demand the return of his things (meaning his clothes) and went personally to collect them. She says that after the death of her husband, an "uncle", a brother or relative of her deceased husband[18], "inherited" her as a wife, and she moved from her husband's compound, of which Sigmar was now the head, to the compound of this second husband. However, he did nothing to help her, and this is why she moved back to Sigmar's compound, or rather, why Sigmar allowed her and her children to return. Sigmar explains that Tom's mother is much older than he is, so that he agreed to let her live with him, but had no sexual relations with her.

Thus, Tom's grandmother and mother, Sigmar's disabled brother with his family, some of Tom's siblings and stepsiblings, and the youngest daughter of the grandmother, are today all living in Sigmar's compound. They all clearly distance themselves from Tom's mother's second husband and his family, who live in the neighboring compound.

Sigmar has taken on the role of father for Tom, his siblings and half- or stepsiblings. They all accept him as their father. Sigmar has supported Tom and his wife, and still supports them in their plans to continue living together as a married couple in civilian life. He has repeatedly had to convince Tom's parents-in-law that Tom and his family should be allowed to stay in his, Sigmar's, compound. Tom's parents-

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[18] According to our information, the term 'uncle' is used only for the mother's brothers. We found that this distinction is not always strictly adhered to, but this could be due to the fact that we interviewers were Germans and to the translation by our field assistants.

in-law want their daughter to be returned to them, arguing, among other things, that they have not received the full bridewealth (a common situation here).

Sigmar, Tom's grandmother, his mother, and his older brother all speak about Tom's past with understanding and sympathy in the interviews we conducted with them. But the families in neighboring compounds ostracize him and blame him for having returned or survived, because their own children have not come back, and no one knows whether, and by whom, they have been killed. Tom tells us that his position in his extended family is weak because of his past with the LRA. To this day they are "not happy with him", as he puts it. But he prays for them, that they will be forgiven. In the interviews with Tom and his family, there are indications that people think Tom could have killed a child belonging to his relatives. In an interview with Artur Bogner, Tom's brother, who is eleven years older than him, refers to the suspicions of members of the extended family, and insists that Tom did not play any role in the murder of civilians or children from this region.

But how does the family act in respect of Nadia, of whom it is known that, together with other girls, she was forced to murder an abducted girl who was her friend and came from a neighboring compound? In the individual interview we conducted with him, her father talked about this at length and spoke about her abduction with sympathy. He wanted us to interview Nadia and arranged a meeting in his compound to which almost the whole family came. Everyone knew that this was the interviewer's last visit, because she was due to leave Uganda in a couple of days. Present, besides various children and daughters-in-law, were the severely disabled grandmother (she can only move about by crawling on all fours), Tom's mother, his sister, his younger brother, his wife, and Sigmar. They listen sympathetically to Nadia, who also recounts what she can remember of Tom's abduction. Nadia talks openly about the way she was ordered to commit vicious murders, and how she had to obey. This included kicking the girl from the neighboring compound, who was abducted on the same occasion, until she was dead, biting a civilian to death, cutting off body parts of civilians until they died, or setting fire to buildings in which civilians were hiding. When she explains how they were made to sit on dead bodies to eat their food, her father encourages and comforts her. Sigmar assures us that this is true; these are typical methods used by the LRA.

Like Johann, Nadia asks for forgiveness. But it is the people she helped to kill, and not her family, whom she begs to forgive her. She says that she keeps dreaming of them, and that she talks about them with other former child soldiers who were also involved in the murder of her friend from the next compound. She still finds the memory of her friend's murder very distressing, she says, even though her father has "paid" compensation. Sigmar tells how the family of the dead girl demanded compensation after the return of his daughter. At first, he had refused to pay. But the evil spirit had then moved from his daughter to another girl returnee, who was also involved in this murder, and then to her two children, who both died as a result. So, like the parents of the other girl, he decided to pay (200,000 shillings, which is

about the monthly pay of an ordinary soldier). Sigmar is sure that the evil spirit has now gone away.

At the end of this interview with Nadia and the subsequent discussion with the family, Tom's younger brother, who, like the older brother, speaks English quite well because of his schooling, says a prayer and takes leave of the interviewer in English.

How can this striking family dynamic be explained? We were impressed by the way the members of this family respected and supported each other, the way various members of the family were accommodated in the compound as if this were perfectly normal, the way Tom's brothers were enabled to go to school, the absence of alcohol abuse or violence as a theme in the interviews, and, not least, our participatory observations in the compound. Clearly, the family possesses more educational capital than the families of Johann and Lydia, and probably also more economic capital. This probably goes back, directly or indirectly, to Obote's two periods of government. We assume that at that time the family was also able to build up greater social capital, in the sense of a network of social or interpersonal relations providing mutual support. We can also assume that this family's acceptance, and even respect for, the returned former rebels is due to the fact that for several generations its men had been voluntarily or forcibly recruited (the grandfather in the Second World War or Tom's father by the UPDA), and especially to the fact that Tom's father served voluntarily as a soldier under Obote, and also, as a rebel fighter, contributed to the overthrow of Idi Amin. This explains the family's opposition to Museveni's government and a certain basic acceptance of the LRA's military struggle – despite disapproval of its methods.

3.5   The discourse among civilians and in the Acholi public

Our observations in the families of former child soldiers generally showed an ambivalent attitude toward them and cautious or distanced interactions. We observed the same behavior in group discussions, and, as shown above, in our workshop on the dialogue between ex-rebels and civilians. However, these difficulties in relations with former child soldiers are seldom described in a clear or detailed manner in the dominant discourses on the LRA in Acholiland, and therefore cannot be adequately dealt with.

In this section, our discussion of the ambivalent they-image of the ex-rebels is based on our sequential analysis of three group discussions with largely "unschooled" villagers and with town dwellers who have been to school and college or university[19]. Most importantly, we will show how villagers and town dwellers differ in terms of which patterns of interpretation in respect of returned child soldiers play a dominant role in the discussions, and thus also in discourses among civilians, and

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[19] The three group discussions referred to in this chapter were conducted in January 2016 by Artur Bogner together with George Ochan.

which topics are merely hinted at, or denied, or tabooed. The results of this analysis are in line with analyses of other group discussions, thematically focused interviews with experts, individual biographical interviews with civilians, and the results of a discourse analysis of material from the print media.

In addition to the above-mentioned components of an apologetic discourse which demands that the amnesty laws should also be made to apply to the highest LRA leaders, and which makes the government responsible for the armed conflict and its consequences, the most significant feature that is common to both the discourse among "educated" town-dwellers and the discourse among the rural population, usually those with less access to formal education, is an emphasis on the fact that relations with the returned ex-rebels are normal, in line with the dominant discourse of reconciliation. Especially the villagers stress the harmonious nature of their relations with the returnees. Another striking feature of the group discussions is the effort made by members of both groupings to speak about the former child soldiers in a "politically correct" way. This attitude is supported and often explicitly demanded, at least in Acholiland (and West Nile), by NGOs and government agencies that act in the local arena, including the army (see for instance Allen 2006: 141f.,139–148).

Our sequential analysis of the group discussions, in which we reconstructed the rules determining the course of the discussion, the topics treated, and the distribution of speakers, shows, however, that this way of talking and the effort to project a positive they-image of the returnees cannot be maintained as the discussions progress. It must be noted here that the course of the group discussions was largely determined by the participants themselves and not by the interviewers. It is clear that not only in the course of the discussions, but also in the course of long speeches by the participants, the rules of the dominant discourse gave way at some point to a more negative image of the returnees.

The "educated" town dwellers. A total of ten people, four women and six men, all aged around thirty, participated in the two group discussions conducted with them in English in January 2016. At the time of the interview, two of the women were teachers in Gulu, another woman was a hotel manager, and one male participant was working as a documentary filmmaker. The other six participants worked for (foreign) NGOs in various functions and said – in some cases right at the beginning when introducing themselves – that they come into contact with "former child abductees" in the course of their everyday work.

The main difference between these two discussions and the group discussion with villagers is that the teachers and NGO workers, despite the use of the narrative interview method and repeated requests by the interviewer to recount concrete interactions with returned child soldiers, do not offer narrations of such interactions. Rather, the statements made by the town dwellers remain on a very general level and are mostly of an argumentative nature. This can be illustrated by the following answer given by a participant to a request to recount a particular experience. He begins

by emphasizing that he has had experience of dealing with former child soldiers, but then presents this experience in argumentative terms, as follows:

> "I've experienced from them, many of them, they are trouble causer they are also disciplined … also hard-working, when we educate them to do something they better understand … they're hard-working is another of my experience, the positive."

This they-image of the former rebels as disciplined, hard-working and willing to learn – "when we educate them" – is shared by all the other town dwellers, as in the case of this NGO worker:

> "so I seeing them they are hard-working they are doing great jobs most of them wanted to have training they're not sitting back, not like other youths where you are taking to school to technical school you see them drinking wasting resources, when you compare with them they're hard-working, when you take a child who is who is from the bush and you take a child who's who was never gone to the bush and you take them to technical school when you compare you'll see the one from the bush is hard-working."

In this group discussion, as in many individual interviews, emphasis is laid on the fact that the returnees are disciplined. This is seen as being due to their military training in the LRA. An interviewee who is a social worker, for example, says:

> "I'd like to say something on what has been said on discipline and hard work I think that by training the military or hmm let's say the forces are the most discipline you know the section within society because of the rules and commands that you know they work with and so these kids who were formerly abducted they have always from the bush they have rules of declaration that they should follow some of them were born in captivity and so they have been following these rules and declaration so wherever they go or whenever they understand you know the law you know the rules the declaration all the procedures that you should get propose how people's way of life that is what they lived by and who-ever obeys any rules and declarations is disciplined because you don't go against the so when they come they're also aware that when they come back within communities there are certain rules and regulations that they **must** follow."

Thus, he underlines that the returnees have learned to follow rules strictly. He says they do their best because they want to be accepted. But this also requires teaching and supervision:

> "So when they go through these trainings the counselling and all of that and then they are trained on things like to do let's say like carpentry, yeah the person

knows that that's his thing now so he has to work hard to survive, so that makes them hard-working and then as a result of the counselling all that makes them disciplined, that's after the counselling and training then and all that."

Another participant adds: "**after** the counselling".

In this quotation, as in many other parts of the discussion, we see clearly how the participants think that counselling or social therapy is important for making the ex-rebels into what they describe in their positive they-image. In other words, the returnees become hard-working and active people through the efforts of instructors and teachers. The implication is that this would not be the case without counselling, training or therapy. This argument can be seen as a way of confirming the importance of the speakers' own work as teachers, instructors or members of NGOs. This view in respect of resocializing returned child soldiers is not expressed so dogmatically in individual interviews or group discussions with villagers. The latter are much more inclined to say of the returnees that 'some are like this and others are like that'.

In both groupings, however, strongly positive images of the ex-rebels are contrasted with negative aspects. Everyone is agreed that some returnees are possessed by harmful or dangerous spirits, are emotionally unstable, and sometimes aggressive. In the discussion with educated town dwellers, this is explained by a teacher. In accordance with the need to express herself politically correctly, she begins as follows:

"so in the classroom we have also seen some of them are aggressive".

She continues in a more generalizing way:

"In a slight discussion or any example that you make in reference to say for example the war or **any interaction** between even the students themselves make them to be so aggressive and you find them sometimes fighting many times they fight because they were used to this rough rough rough kind of life in the bush so in the school setting we still experience that some students with such kind of problems they are aggressive."

By stressing how rough the life in the "bush" was that some of her pupils had been used to, the teacher shows empathy for their problems, sees their past as an explanation, and thus an excuse, for their aggressive behavior at school, and she uses terms like "sometimes" and "some students" to indicate that by no means "all" of them are "always" aggressive. However, other interviewees take the opportunity offered by the group discussion to express their general criticisms of this grouping, as shown by the following passage:

"from those from there from the returnees //hm// what I've seen from them they often have **low self-esteem** …they believe that they are not what that they are not **equal** to other people … who were not in the frontline **like in the bush** another one they are **so** isolative, those people they don't they're not social, they don't like staying together with people and the other one what I've experienced from them they hate challenge, they don't want to be challenged maybe if you if you're **they don't want arguments** when you argue with them they are you're you're arguing with me you're talking like this I'm I'm someone who is from the bush and they're taking advantage //hm// so they like being those things, **they're also arrogant, they're so arrogant**, in the way- cause like I don't know why there is a (period) they're overprotected by the government of Uganda … **they're also** (shut damn fast), they overreact fast, //hm// they're also … they're also trouble causers, that is a fact … they're trouble causers."

The NGO worker quoted in this passage seems to talk himself into a rage, beginning to stutter, and speaking in a loud and angry voice. He does not attempt to relativize or qualify these preconceived opinions of child soldiers who have returned from the "bush". He says they think they are superior, they are arrogant, they isolate themselves, they are unsocial, they try to take advantage of their past, they overreact fast, and it is a fact that they are trouble causers. While he talks, a female participant several times shows her approval by saying "Yeah" or "That's true", and in her subsequent speech she adds that "their spirits were never good", which may seem a surprising thing for an academic to say.

However, we should not forget here that this they-image of the returned former rebels cannot be seen apart from people's own experience of the civil war in northern Uganda. It is bound up with their own suffering, often with traumatizing situations, and the consequences of what they suffered. The encounter with ex-rebels awakes memories of past suffering. This can be seen clearly in a long sequence from the group discussion. Although Artur Bogner, the interviewer, repeatedly asked the participants to recount situations in which they had interacted with returned rebels, memories of encounters with them as members of the LRA pushed their way into the foreground. This also explains why it is not easy for them to overcome the emotional distance they feel toward the returnees.

Before this backdrop, it is easier to understand the two sequences referred to above if we consider them in the light of the biographical experiences spoken about in the group discussions by these two speakers. They both begin by saying that they would now like to recount a "personal experience", as requested by the interviewer. The NGO worker does not begin, as one might expect, with an experience connected with his daily work, but says instead that when he was a child he saw the dead body of a decapitated child soldier in the hall of his school. This is a memory, as he says in the interview, that is still traumatic for him today. Here, one might ask whether other traumatizing experiences are bound up with this memory and the image of the decapitated child. This story rouses other memories of suffering caused

by the LRA. A female participant begins her long narration – lasting about ten minutes – by explaining that her experiences during the war are still painful to her today. She reports what she has been told about the attack on her village and the murder of her mother and other relatives. She herself was not present. She says that the rebels cut her mother's corpse into pieces in the "bush" and kept them until they had decayed. During another attack on the village, seven people were killed, including her brother and an uncle. She says she often thinks of these situations and tries to imagine exactly what happened. She says it made her angry and aggressive when neighbors, who were not Acholi, started calling her "Kony":

> "Kony Kony Kony so one day when another mentioned that I remember what happened … I became so arrogant of this woman not that have gone to the bush not that I've had been abducted but because of that personal experience of that I got out of this I was like my friend what are you talking **about**, you are now calling all **of us** Kony you've given us a general name as being Kony have you ever seen them panga[20] do you really know how it looks like //hm// my dear that is what we're going to use to chop you also into pieces."

The murders in her family had very direct consequences for her. She and her siblings had lost their mother, and her brother left four small children, which put the family in financial difficulties. As a result, she and her siblings, as well as the nieces and nephews, often could not go to school because there was no money to pay the costs. At the end of this account of what she herself describes as her "traumatic experiences" as a child, she makes a comparison:

> "When we when we talk about the war it is not always those who were abducted who got affected, even people who were never abducted people or who were never living in the bush were affected a live example is myself."

She presents her experiences as evidence that not only the abducted child soldiers, but also children who were not abducted, were affected by the war. This argument is put forward by other participants in the group discussions. They describe themselves as "victims", and talk about how difficult the war years were, and how they suffered when family members or friends were abducted.

Overall, both group discussions showed that people's ambivalent images of the returned child soldiers are a result of the difference between what they suffered themselves during the civil war and experiences with returnees in the context of their daily work today. People's interpretations of the behavior of child soldiers, and especially the expressions they use to speak about them, are also influenced by the dominant discourses in the NGOs. In both group discussions, our impression is that

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[20] The word "panga" designates a kind of machete in Swahili. The speaker apparently uses the term here as a verb.

these discourses at first make people hesitate to speak about what they suffered during the war – including, in particular, their acute fear of being abducted as children or adolescents. This is bound up with the conviction that no one is interested in what they suffered, which helps to explain the complaint that former child soldiers are "overprotected" by the Ugandan government.

Extremely interesting is the obvious uncertainty regarding how to refer to the former child soldiers. It is striking that the expression "formerly abducted children"[21], which is used in both group discussions during the initial introductions, is used less and less as the discussion proceeds, and instead, people use the term "former child soldiers" and in the end just "former soldiers" or "former rebels" or "ex-rebels". The participants are clearly uncertain about how to refer to the "returnees" in this context. This can be observed, in contrast to other passages, in the way people stutter, or pause, or try to correct themselves ("but for the ex-soldiers, I mean the, the ex-rebels").

The "educationally alienated" villagers. The group discussion with ten participants from different villages in Acholiland was also carried out at the beginning of spring 2016.[22] Seven participants were women and three were men. At the time of the interview, the youngest person was in her late twenties, and the oldest was probably in her early fifties. All ten participants lived in families with many children, and defined themselves as farmers, and as members of the Catholic Church. Most of them had never been to school, or only for a short time.

Even more than in the case of town dwellers, the people in Acholiland who survived the civil war in their villages or in camps, the so-called protected villages which were put up by the government, have a they-image of the returned rebels that is determined by their own past suffering and traumas, their memories of looting, abduction and murder of civilians, the death of relatives or friends, and in some cases their own short-term abduction by the LRA. In contrast to the group discussions with "educated" people in the town, who were far less affected by the attacks of the LRA, it is striking that the villagers tell fewer stories of their suffering under the LRA. This finding matches the results of the individual biographical interviews which we conducted with them.

On the other hand, they speak more openly than the "educated" town dwellers – usually in the form of anecdotes – about situations in which former child soldiers acted very violently. The stories about former child soldiers that circulate among the villagers ("what people say") produce an image of them that is clearly violent, and at the same time affect-driven. There is a tendency here to characterize former child soldiers as dangerous and unpredictable. For instance, it is recommended that when

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[21] The term "formerly abducted children" is used in official documents of various aid organizations that are active in this region, such as Unicef or World Vision (Unicef 2009: 58; cf. Odora 2016). We promised our interviewees that they would remain anonymous, and we will therefore refrain here from quoting documents produced by organizations with which they are, or were, connected.

[22] The discussion was held in Luo and was translated into English by G. Ochan.

you are walking along with a formerly abducted person, you should avoid walking in front of them, because they might suddenly attack you from behind and kill you. When asked by the interviewer whether they know of a case where this actually happened, the interviewees begin telling concrete anecdotes, all of which concern not themselves but other people. For instance, two women who had returned from the "bush" are said to have brutally murdered their small children by strangling them or by beating them to death with a wooden club. Another interviewee tells of a male returnee who went with his father on an outing and then cut him into pieces with a machete ("panga"). A striking feature of these stories is the inclusion of many graphic details. For example, in the story of the man who murdered his father, the narrator says that the son hit him twelve times with the machete, and quotes the last words addressed by the son to his father:

> "he ((the ex-rebel)) all of a sudden told the father that 'I see that your time of resting has come'."

One wonders whether this was reported by witnesses who were present at the murder, or even by the perpetrator himself. However, it is possible, and quite probable, that this is how people imagine that it happened. We believe that these stories of things that have happened to other people are "horror stories" or "urban legends" that circulate in the rural milieus of Acholiland, and which are modified and embellished each time they are told. This is not to say that the story of the ex-rebel who murdered his own father or the woman who murdered her own children (a story which was also often told in individual interviews) never happened. It is possible, however, that in the course of time the stories have been embellished with graphic details intended to convey the horror of these deeds. The two stories of the murdered children seem to confirm this idea. When Artur Bogner asks the woman interviewee whether she has personal contact with either of the two mothers, or whether she knows someone who was an eye-witness, George Ochan "translates" her answer as follows: "She doesn't know, it was a hearsay".

Throughout this group discussion, there are indications that the participants are only repeating what other people say about the "returnees". This allows the participants to thematize the negative components of a widespread they-image without having to position themselves. Just like the town dwellers, the villagers try to make clear that their negative examples are exceptions. Thus, the man who spent a long time telling the story of the father who was murdered by his returned son finishes by saying that "the rest of the returnees are living a normal life in the community". In this way, he underlines that this case is a negative exception, and that generally everyone lives in harmonious co-existence.

Like the "educated" town dwellers, the villagers emphasize the positive components of the common they-image of the ex-rebels. In particular, people who have personal contact with formerly abducted children tend to argue against the negative they-image, and especially against the idea that they are possessed by "evil spirits".

These people stress their normality on the basis of their own experience, as shown for example by the following passage, in which G. Ochan reports in English what the woman says:

"She hears most people say that formerly abducted persons, when they come back, their behaviors are strange, they are always violent to the people, and there are times when they are attacked by evil spirits which changes their nature of behavior … She also hears when people say that formerly abducted persons when they begin fighting, they always fight with a strange evil spirit and they are unstoppable but she has not observed it with this person, the one who is living with them, this one lives normally with them."

"The one who is living with them" is normal. This argument – that the people you live with, or who belong to your own family, are normal – runs through the whole discussion. It is clear that people speak much more emotionally and sympathetically about their relatives than they do about people they do not know. Positive examples are emphasized and individual returnees, who are known personally to the speakers, are idealized in absolute terms. A female participant, for instance, talks about a boy with whom she lived and who was later abducted. In her opinion, he was not quarrelsome either before or after his time in the "bush", and he has never had problems in the community: "he has still remained a good person up to now". She emphasizes that "he is not quarrelsome to anyone" and "even if a fighting ensues in a home, he would always not join the fight, he is the one who comes in to separate people from the fight". Some of the other participants also talk in this way. One woman, for instance, says that four of her brothers were abducted, of whom only one has so far returned, but in the case of this one, "there is nothing wrong that he has done till today … he has not done anything bad until today".

Her claim that to this day her brother has not done anything wrong, which is probably rather exaggerated, is substantiated by other participants who give similar examples. This is clearly an idealizing they-image, in which normality is emphasized and conflicts are played down. The more common, opposing, more ambiguous or negative, they-image of "the" ex-rebels is illustrated only by stories that have been heard about other people, and conflicts in the speakers' own communities are denied – although we know they exist from our family and individual interviews, participant observations, and, in particular, interviews with ex-rebels. Rather, both town dwellers and villagers take pains to emphasize reconciliation and normal co-existence, in accordance with the dominant public discourse. Below, we will discuss the function of this way of speaking and take a look at topics that are generally tabooed in the dominant discourse in Acholiland.

3.6   Suppressed topics: Responsibility and intraethnic conflict

As we have shown, questions such as who failed to protect the children and who is responsible for their abduction, or why people hesitate to identify themselves positively with the LRA, are usually shrouded in silence in the interviews with returned child soldiers, in the family interviews, and in the public discourse or the discourse among civilians. Related to this, there appears to be a regular tabooing of the fact that the LRA or its leader, Kony, conducted a kind of war against the Acholi civilian population, both in effect and in intention. This was legitimized by the argument that all Acholi adults were depraved souls, traitors, and even undead or witches (see for instance Branch 2011: 70ff., 69, 2010: 40ff. and passim; Titeca 2010: 65–70, 62f.; Allen 2006: 29ff., 38ff. On the roots of these doctrines in the worldview of the local people, and on the ideology of the predecessor organization, the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM), see Behrend 1999; Allen: 2006 30–39).

In all the interviews and group or family discussions that we conducted, there are only two in which we observe exceptions to this apologetic attitude. These are interviews conducted by Artur Bogner with two prominent civil society leaders in Acholiland. One of them is the Catholic Archbishop of Gulu, and the other is a local Muslim leader, a kadi.[23] At the time of the interviews, they were both members of the "Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative", a prominent local non-government organization devoted to promoting peace and ending the conflict in Acholiland. Among other things, this NGO played a decisive role in the making of an amnesty law which was enacted by parliament and announced by the government at the beginning of the year 2000.

These two interviewees have in common that their respective collective belongings make them outsiders in Acholiland. As a native of the neighboring province of West Nile, the Archbishop is not an Acholi, and the kadi is not a Christian, so that they are both members of a minority. This is probably a condition for being able to speak about the ex-rebels without conforming to the rules of the dominant local discourse.

Toward the end of a long biographical interview which Artur Bogner conducted with him in 2009, the Archbishop said that one of the biggest problems was that the rebels and the Ugandan government did not represent different countries or nations, but that both sides were "Ugandans". And at the end of the interview he explicitly, and of his own accord, mentioned the problem that neither the civilian population nor the government had prevented, or been able to prevent, the children from being abducted by the rebels.

At the beginning of the same interview, he talks about when he first came to Acholiland, and how he explained to the people that he was not a "stranger" here,

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[23] In these cases, even if we do not mention their names, we do not follow our usual practice of anonymizing the interviewees. They were aware of this, since they were interviewed as experts or "key actors". Both interviews were conducted in English.

despite being born in a neighboring province. As he says, the first reason he gave them was that he was a Christian, and the second that he was a Ugandan. We rarely heard such an explicit identification with Uganda in the northern part of this country, and it is perhaps due to the Archbishop's strong sense of belonging to the transnational we-group of "Roman Catholics" that he wanted or was able to express his identification with "Uganda" or "Ugandans" in this unequivocal way. The remarkable thing here is that on his arrival the bishop obviously identified himself as a "stranger" and was aware of the fact that this could be problematic in the local context. At least, to use his own words, he found it necessary to explain to the local people why he was not really a stranger. He thus puts himself in the position of an outsider who is nevertheless part of a broader we-group that includes the Acholi, and who therefore has the right to breach or ignore the rules of their dominant discourse when he speaks.

The other interview referred to above was conducted in 2012 by Artur Bogner with the local kadi in Gulu, an Islamic functionary and local leader. Muslims form a small minority in this region, unlike in West Nile. Thus, he is in an outsider position because of his religious belonging, just as the bishop is an outsider because of his ethnic and regional origin. This kadi speaks openly about the fact, and in his view the problem, that "they" – and by this he apparently means the local civilian population in Acholiland or "the Acholi" – still consider Kony, the leader of the LRA, as one of their own, as a "brother", as he says in English. And this, we may conclude, despite the atrocities, excessive in both quantity and quality, for which the leader of the rebel group is responsible. It is unfortunate that the interviewer did not ask about this use of the term "brother", so that we can only guess what kind of we-group or collective category the kadi is thinking of. Probably, as is common in Africa south of the Sahara, he means it in an ethno-national or ethnic sense, a fellow Acholi, a member of this people[24], but it is also possible that he meant some other we-group, such as "inhabitants of Acholiland", "Christians" or "Luo" (= Luo-speaking people including the Acholi). Very broad categories such as "Ugandans" or "Africans", or even "humans", are also conceivable.[25] Despite this uncertainty with regard to its interpretation, we can safely assume that the term "brother" is used here in the sense

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[24] In this context we prefer not to use the term "ethnic group", even if this means neglecting important differences between modern and non-modern we-groups of an ethnopolitical nature (i.e. groupings who claim to be classified and recognized as a "nation"). We think it is discriminating to refer to small or politically weak groupings in Africa or in the Global South as "ethnic groups", so long as this term is not used also to refer to the Kurds, the Catalans, the Scots or the Jews.

[25] Alfred Schuetz (1944) argued that inconsistency, lack of coherence and vagueness are essential characteristics of everyday knowledge as compared to scientific knowledge, but that this poses no problem in everyday communication between members of a so-called in-group: "The system of knowledge thus acquired – incoherent, inconsistent, and only partially clear, as it is – takes on for the members of the in-group the appearance of a sufficient coherence, clarity, and consistency to give anybody a reasonable chance of understanding and of being understood." (Schuetz 1944: 501).

of someone who has a right to empathy and solidarity in a similar way as a member of one's own family or clan. It seems unlikely that the kadi is thinking of a very broad we-group such as "humans", "Africans" or "Ugandans", because he obviously has doubts about whether these feelings of solidarity are justifiable (doubts which would not apply to "Africans" or "Ugandans"). At any rate, it is clear that he considers the way people identify themselves with the rebel leader as both a definitive fact *and* a problem. He is referring here to what in the African context is often labeled as "tribalism": other labels could also be used to describe the basic problem, because the we-groups in question can be of very different kinds, including religious communities and voluntary associations such as political movements, parties or protestant "free churches".[26]

Anyone who is familiar with the historical context (see chapter 2) will suspect that the opposition of the whole we-group of the Acholi, or at least most of them, to the central government is enough to explain their lenient or positive attitude to the rebels. Among other things, many people think that the LRA's claim to be defending the Acholi against genocide by the government is a plausible argument. On the internet, there are many articles, websites and semiprofessional reports that accuse the government of planning and carrying out a genocide, for example by deliberately infecting the civilian population with the AIDS virus through prostitution or through the rape of Acholi women by infected government soldiers. The government had put considerable pressure on large numbers of people to relocate to camps – ostensibly for their protection – where the humanitarian and hygienic conditions were at times catastrophic. These were often equated with "concentration camps", although the people living there were relatively free to leave (and although many of them have chosen to remain there to this day).[27]

We do not deny that massive human rights violations and war crimes were committed by the government army, especially in the period immediately following its seizure of power and the rebellion in Acholiland, and in the context of setting up so-called "protected villages" for the civilian population. What concerns us – especially in the light of our empirical material – is that these lines of argument implicitly

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[26] The most basic distinction in these cases is whether membership is voluntary (including freedom to leave) or whether it is "primordial" for the individual and his biography, in the sense of a group into which individuals usually are born and to which they belong, generally on the basis of an early form of interdependence. Islam is an interesting and important case here: it is between these opposite poles because people are free to join but not to leave.

[27] See for example https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fvGfDWaG8TkM (accessed: 3 June 2020); http://exposeugandasgenocide.blogspot.de/2007/10/fact-sheet-on-ugandas-president-yoweri.html (accessed: 3 June 2020). The ethnographic study by Finnström (2008: 182) quotes stories to this effect told by former inhabitants of the camps. On the relative mobility of the inhabitants, see ibid.: 138. On the (implied) comparison of these government camps to Nazi concentration camps, and the government's repressive measures to genocide, see ibid.: 144ff.; 169ff.; 186ff. And for the same in plain terms and not through the mouth of informants, see Mwenda 2010: 56.

relativize the crimes of the LRA in contrast to the alleged "genocide" committed by the government. This relativizing tendency can be found in studies by social scientists (for example Finnström 2008), where there is hardly any discussion of the instrumental military role of the camps, which served officially to protect, but in fact to control the local population and to cut the rebel guerilla army off from support by the civilians. On the other hand, excessive emphasis is laid on the instrumental aspects of the LRA's manner of conducting the war (including the abduction and forcible recruiting of large numbers of children), which are thus implicitly justified or accepted as (apparently permissible) "military" activities.[28]

The suspicion of attempted genocide on the part of the government is explicitly voiced by a locally well-known spokesman of the LRA in an interview with Artur Bogner in 2012. This interviewee even argues that the use of DDT in northern Uganda to combat malaria is an example of the means employed by the government to murder the Acholi.

The conflict between the Acholi and the government is criticized in a similar manner, but in the weaker sense of a "cultural genocide", by another church dignitary who, like the above-mentioned religious spokesman, was also a member of the "Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative". He blames the government for the poor level of education among the Acholi. What he does not say is that this can be seen as one of the direct and indirect consequences of the civil war with the LRA, which has lasted for nearly twenty years, and is related to the economic depression and lack of infrastructure due to the war and macroviolence in northern Uganda since at least 1986 (and in West Nile even earlier). In the interview conducted by A. Bogner in spring 2012, this man speaks at great length about the way the Acholi are disadvantaged and marginalized in Uganda. This interview is remarkable because at the beginning the man talks about how the LRA abused, raped and murdered his wife and his daughter, and how the memory of this experience still causes him great pain. Yet in the rest of the interview this event is not mentioned again. Thus, there are two separate themes in this interview: on the one hand, great suffering at the hands of the LRA, and on the other hand indirect justification of the LRA rebellion in terms of the way the Acholi are marginalized. This is not as contradictory as it might appear. It is a pattern of interpretation that can be found everywhere in this part of Uganda: the government is to blame for not having protected the Acholi from the rebels.[29]

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[28] In this point the dominant discourse among Ugandan academics, which is currently critical of the government and often apologetic in respect of the LRA, is the reverse of government-friendly discourses.

[29] This (formally correct) argument can be found for example in the report quoted above (and see previous footnotes), because the "protected villages" were set up in such a way that the government soldiers in the middle were relatively well protected, while the civilians who lived around them or on the edges of the camp were practically unprotected against sudden attacks by the LRA. In this frequently expressed pattern of interpretation, what people suffered during the war was not primarily due

This criticism of Museveni's government serves to cover up criticism of the LRA or any suggestion of intraethnic conflict, which are taboo topics. This can be seen for instance in the text structure of the interview with the religious spokesman. In other words, instead of speaking about the crimes and errors of the LRA, people prefer to speak about the crimes committed by the government army, the government's crimes and errors, and its policy of deliberately debilitating the Acholi. In our interviews, we find no criticism of the LRA or of Joseph Kony; instead, the LRA leaders are treated with empathy or respect and some people explicitly say that they ought to be covered by the amnesty law. From this we conclude that the interviewees find it very difficult to distance themselves from the LRA because its leaders belong to the we-group of the Acholi. We also conclude that many civilians at least secretly accept the opinion that the rebels of the LRA are the more genuine, more 'pure', or better Acholi, and feel collective shame because of their military defeat, and because of the military defeats of the governments of Obote and Okello which many Acholi had supported. In the light of the military tradition of the Acholi since colonial times, it is clear that many people must feel ashamed because of "their" military failure to prevent the seizure of power by Museveni's rebel army, which was recruited mainly from other parts of the country.

Apart from the strong collective egocentrism that exists in many we-groups, the fact that this defeat is felt by many Acholi as extremely humiliating is probably also connected with their particular collective reputation and collective self-image as skillful soldiers who are willing to fight; at least this is often assumed by members of other we-groups in Uganda. In addition to this self-image of the Acholi as fine soldiers ready to do battle, we assume that in figurations of armed conflict or macroviolence between groups (see Senghaas 1994: 83) the normal processes of collective egocentrism, i.e. the usual over-valuation or absolutization of the dominant we-image, are sufficiently effective. Thus, our interviewees never consider the possible reasons, whether good or bad, that their opponent or enemy might have for acting as it does.

The historical difference between the Acholi and groupings living in the southern parts of Uganda, just like the distinction between the Acholi and their western neighbors (in West Nile), is a "social fact", to use a term from classical sociology. Even though it may be considered politically "incorrect" or undesirable to *thematize* so-called "tribalism" (in reality: non-state nationalism or political regionalism) publicly in Africa today, i.e. to recognize it as a (socio-)historical fact, the forms of collective egocentrism or group centrism which this term refers to are certainly not, at least not always, only recent phenomena. As with state nationalisms, the groups concerned stabilize each other *mutually* in a kind of long-term "vicious circle", or, to put it differently, in a sociological interrelationship which contributes essentially to their

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to the LRA, whose attacks are comparable to a natural disaster and are to be accepted as such, but to the government which deliberately failed to protect the civilian population. While this view may be politically realistic, it is remarkably tolerant of the no less Machiavellian methods of the LRA.

long-term reproduction and consolidation. In such a form of interdependency, distrustful discourses lead to hostile actions, and hostile actions to distrustful discourses. Collective images of history and collective we-images are practically two sides of the same coin. Important here is the regular reproduction of derogatory, or even demonizing, they-images of one or more other groupings with which one's own we-group is bound up through relations of dependency or conflict. Each grouping is essentially constituted with the aid of a collective we-image, together with corresponding they-images of other groupings. Not least, collective violence between the groupings serves to increase mutual distrust. In Ugandan history, these interrelationships are connected in particular with the issue of which groupings or leaders (and opinion leaders) have *control over the army* and how this control is exercised. For reasons which have their roots in Uganda's colonial history, very soon after independence this control was concentrated in the hands of political or military leaders from the north of the country, Obote and Idi Amin, and finally (with the end of Obote's second government) two Acholi generals. However, these leaders from northern Uganda were in office for only a few months before being ousted by the rebel party of the present head of state through military force.

This is not the place to discuss the problem of the formal and sociological (i.e. felt) legitimacy of this new government. For a long-term observation and analysis, the decisive point is that ethnically colored or ethnopolitical differences became politicized and radicalized, and the tensions and conflicts based on them led to an increasing use of collective armed violence. In the long term, this made the army, i.e. the most important agent of armed violence, the dominant means or source of power in Ugandan politics and society (see Kagoro 2015: chapter 2; Schubert 2008; Van Acker 2004; Doom/Vlassenroot 1999: 7f.). From the early constitutional conflict of 1966 up to the seizure of power by the current government, peoples or ethnopolitical groupings in northern Uganda, or their (opinion) leaders, enjoyed increasing political and/or military influence. This *parallelism and entanglement of the two clearest long-term tendencies to date* in the development of the post-colonial state was thus broken by the NRA led by Museveni. Many Acholi obviously regarded the military victory and seizure of power by his rebel movement as a great injustice involving the loss of their privileged positions in the army and the civil service (though not in the non-state sector of business and formal organizations) which they had always regarded as legitimate. In the words of Wojciech Jagielski, an internationally respected journalist:

> "Disaster struck the Acholi at their time of greatest triumph, when their countryman from Kitgum, General Tito Okello, had gained power in Uganda." (Jagielski 2012: 72)

Without a knowledge of this background, it is not possible to fully understand the intensity and tenacity of the resistance and the insurgency movements among the Acholi (even if there are some enlightening similarities in the comparable situation

and the rebellions that were organized in West Nile from 1979 onward). This ex-plains why the Acholi are prepared to show empathy and sympathy for various rebel groups, including the LRA, which fought against the government army with some degree of success for at least two decades, and whose leader, Kony, has not yet been caught. Civilians, and also "returnees", frequently say that Kony is alive and well and obviously indestructible. It is said that he has superhuman powers that enable him to divine the future or read people's thoughts. In a way, Kony's LRA saved the collective self-image of the Acholi, their collective sense of being good soldiers or warriors. This empathy for, and sometimes even pride in, Kony's military successes arises from the warrior myth[30] which for many Acholi seems to be an inherent part of their we-image and we-feeling – in other words, their "identity" as a great or important people. This is obviously true despite the fact that the LRA has caused many of them terrible suffering as individuals, whether through the loss of their children who were abducted or who died or were killed, or in other ways. Here, as in other contexts, there seems to be a split between the collective we-image that is wounded but nevertheless still a source of self-respect, and people's individual self-image, which causes them shame because it contains memories of unbearable loss and humiliation, and of personal helplessness or powerlessness.[31]

In this kind of context, characterized by poverty, often "absolute" poverty, and unending "war events", people as individuals often feel weak, vulnerable and pow-erless. Belonging to a larger collective, however this collective is defined, and even if it exists chiefly in their imagination, can help to raise their self-esteem and give them a feeling of "economic", "physical" or "social" security.

It is possible that people interpret the suffering inflicted on them by the LRA as their own personal suffering, their individual fate, and as a (more or less) necessary evil. The long duration of the LRA as a strong rebel movement is a reason for col-lective pride, from which Kony, the rebel leader, benefits. But the fighting spirit of the LRA and its relative success, which support the collective self-esteem of the we-

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[30] A lot has been written about the historical origins of this warrior myth, which is seen by many authors as resulting from the policies and ideologies of the British colonial authorities, and which was, and still is, applied to various groups living in northern Uganda. See Schubert 2008; Kagoro 2015: ch. 4.

[31] This kind of split in the balance between the individual and collective foundations of a person's agency and "identity", and in their perception of these foundations, is more common in the Global South, at least compared to the Global North. It often makes it difficult for people from the Global North to understand people in the Global South, to grasp their biographically sedimented experiences in all their concrete details and ramifications, the situations recorded in their memories and the resulting relevances, motives, regularities and social rules. The everyday life of people in the Global South is saturated in all its fibers and dimensions with experiences of poverty and inequality, and/or (in war areas) armed violence, as well as experiences of intolerable repression, whether by the state or other powerful actors. The indirect or hidden effects of these "phenomena" are more obvious to ordinary people in the Global South than to observers whose perceptions and ways of thinking have been shaped by very different experiences.

group, play no role in people's relationships with former child soldiers. The latter are perceived as helpless, and thus shameful, victims, perhaps even as deserters or traitors to the common cause. They are separated from the collective pride because they did not join the rebels voluntarily and are thus mainly victims, and not autonomous actors with individual responsibility for these processes. This can be illustrated by the public discourse in Acholiland on Dominic Ongwen, an LRA "General" whose case has been before the International Criminal Court since 2015. Contrary to the way he is presented as a victim in the Ugandan media, especially in the most influential opposition newspaper, he is regarded among the Acholi as a proven military leader who possesses the positive quality of being an acting subject. He is admired despite his notorious cruelty. After he was arrested, two different families laid claim to him in a public dispute.[32] This distinguishes him from other former child soldiers who, like him, were recruited by abduction. How can this striking difference between the image of a high-ranking LRA commander and that of lower-ranking former child soldiers be explained? As we see it, the weak position of the returnees in their social environment and especially in their local milieu of origin shows the futility of the many sacrifices which the rebellion of the LRA has cost the Acholi. The "strength" of the LRA commanders and especially Kony's supposed invulnerability and invincibility have instead the opposite effect. Here, there is apparently a wide gap between the collective and the individual self-image. The suffering of individuals as individuals is relatively insignificant compared to the suffering and the well-being of the collective.

The extent to which the former child soldiers, in contrast to the LRA leaders, are regarded as passive, weak, and, perhaps for this very reason, as individuals who do not invite empathic identification, can be observed in the workshop we conducted. It is clear, for instance, in a part of the discussion in which a civilian woman puts the following question to the ex-rebels:

> "A question is when you were in the bush, was there some kind of orientation or deceiving you that you were going to overthrew the government?"

In a way, this question raises the issue of whether the ex-rebels are guilty. They were deceived and they were children when they were abducted: all the civilian participants, and some of the ex-rebels, agree on this. It is first confirmed by a former child soldier who had attained the rank of a commander in the "bush" and who was a grown man when he returned. He also explains that in 1998 it looked as if a military victory over Museveni was possible. Tom also agrees and says they deluded themselves that they could topple the government. And then Isabelle, a former child soldier, says:

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[32] Daily Monitor, January 24, 2015 (Ocungi, Julius: "Two families claim Ongwen, demand DNA test") https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Two-families-claim-Ongwen--demand-DNA-test/688334-2599758-ea6ire/index.html (accessed: 3 June 2020).

"We were not only deceived, that we are going to overthrow the government, there was also that we were now going to be the real Acholis, all those remain here at home, have not died from Ebola, now been scotched by HIV and AIDS, so we are now going to be the real: Acholis."

Then Lydia says that she was very young when she was with the LRA and she had imagined that Kony would take over from Museveni. Maria then turns to the civilian who had asked the question:

"My sister, we will you accept, that we were deceived like that they told us, that we were going to overthrow the government, come and start a new generation of the Acholis."

The sixth ex-rebel who was present then speaks, explaining that when he was abducted he was a very devout Christian and that he therefore had no problem believing what he heard about the "holy spirit". The idea had been communicated by this spirit. And it had been spread not only by Joseph Kony, but also by other rebel groups, such as the *West Nile Bank Front* and the *Allied Democratic Forces*. In addition, leaders from other nations had come and allied themselves to the LRA. In other words, all these people had believed that they would be able to topple Museveni's government.

How do the civilians react after all the ex-rebels have clearly stated that they believed, or were convinced, that the rebels would win the war? And what about that part of the LRA discourse which distinguishes between pure and impure, or real and not real, Acholi? Does anyone refer to it? The interviewer, G. Rosenthal, asks the civilians how they feel about what the ex-rebels have said.

A woman civilian from a village says that she sympathizes with the ex-rebels, because they had believed they could overthrow the government. She says they were too young, otherwise they would have seen that achieving this goal was impossible from their location in the "bush". A close examination of this passage shows that the fact that the ex-rebels were children is emphasized, and that this is an attempt to enlighten them in respect of the errors of the LRA and the way they were deceived:

"If they were older, they couldn't believed, that they are gonna overthrow the government from the bush. They would have understood, that to overthrow the government, you need to come and attack the town or follow the main highways, but not to remain in the bush."

At this point no one blames the LRA leaders for this deception; the focus is only on the inability of the abductees to recognize it as a deception due to their young age. This interpretation is subsequently confirmed by other civilians. They assure each other that the ex-rebels were too young to understand what the commanders, who were also their teachers, were telling them about the "holy spirit".

The child soldiers are relieved of guilt with the argument that they were too young to understand, and Kony and his commanders are only blamed for following an inappropriate military strategy. There is no criticism of their ambition to overthrow the government, or of their practice of abducting children and young adolescents as recruits.

In the questions addressed to the ex-rebels by the civilians it is striking that they do not question the attacks by the LRA on the villages and so-called protected villages. The strategy followed by the LRA, or its military aspects, are sometimes thematized, but not the rebellion as such, or the war against the civilian population as its means.

3.7   Conclusion: Recognizing, overcoming or ignoring barriers

The last sequences from the workshop quoted above give rise to the following questions: Under these conditions, how can the figuration between the ex-rebels and the civilians be described? How do the ex-rebels feel about the sympathy that is repeatedly expressed by the civilians during the workshop? How do they feel about the attempt to enlighten them about the way they were deceived, which from the perspective of the ex-rebels looks like an excuse or justification for the civilians' failure to support the rebellion, but for the civilians is a way of generously forgiving them for the acts of violence they have committed? Here, we ask whether the ex-rebels accept the role ascribed to them, that they are like children to whom the civilians are reaching out a hand to help them find their place again in civilian life. Especially in the workshop, there are indications at several points that they only appear to accept their ascribed role as children or adolescents who are willing to learn, and that they are not willing to accept the stretched out hand – to stick with the same metaphor – that is offered to them. In a way, they feel superior to the civilians and do not trust the offer to break down the barriers. Their feeling of superiority is expressed, for example, when, at the end of the round of questions, Isabelle responds to the civilians' last question, whether there were times when they felt happy in the "bush", by saying:

> "what makes me happy … I lived there ((in the bush)) and came back so I know, among women, there are very few who knows about a gun. There are maybe only a hundred, and I am among those hundred, who know how to use a gun."

Isabelle looks around, points to the civilians and the researchers, and continues: "even right now if I would have a gun I can defend all of us and protect us all". At this everybody laughs, and Isabelle says very assuredly: "so you are safe".

In this sequence, we can assume that everyone who was present – including the researchers and their field assistant – was convinced by this declaration, which underscores, not without pride, the (superior) power to act, or ability to act, of this ex-rebel. However, it is clear that the researchers and civilians could feel safe only if Isabelle wanted to protect them – but not if she wanted to attack. Thus, in the figuration between civilians and ex-rebels we must not forget that behind the civilians' reference to the ex-rebels as children who need to be enlightened, is the knowledge that they are in the weaker position: they know that in an armed conflict they would be unable to defend themselves, and that the others have acquired the competence to survive in the "bush" under extremely difficult conditions. This was expressed very clearly by a villager when he heard how long the rebels who were present had been in the "bush":

> "to survive 16 years in the bush it is a sign that he is a **brave soldier**, who was able to maneuver and pass through every hard situations ... is somebody who pass through a lot of problems and also develops survival techniques"

This shows what is also meant or connoted by the frequently heard praise of the ex-rebels for their discipline and willingness to work. The rebels' feeling of strength can also be seen in another way: they show empathy when the civilians talk about what they have suffered and are able to adopt their perspective. For instance, Maria, an ex-rebel, comforts the teacher when he speaks about the present problems in his family and holds his hand when he begins to cry.

The rejection by the ex-rebels of the hand offered by the civilians to tear down the barriers between the two groupings can be shown by an exercise that was held at the end of the workshop. This exercise clearly indicates that the ex-rebels – at least in this workshop which was otherwise assessed by all parties as very successful – believe that the barriers between themselves and the civilians can be removed only to a small degree, while the civilians think they can be completely torn down.

During the question-and-answer session the ex-rebels sat opposite the civilians. There was a barrier between them, constructed by the facilitators, consisting of several drinks crates, overturned chairs, cardboard boxes, and small things like packets of biscuits. This barrier symbolized the differences and difficulties in the relationship between the two groups. After the exercise in which each side put questions to the other side, the instructor said now that the workshop was nearly at an end, each group should consider how many objects in the barrier had been removed. They could discuss this question and decide whether no objects, one object or two objects had been removed. Each group held a discussion and chose one member to actively implement its joint (!) decision. A civilian who was a university graduate jumped up from his chair and with great speed and physical effort removed all the objects except for one chair. He did this so quickly that the ex-rebel who had also stood up could do nothing. This action was not in accordance with the instructions given, and

in addition it attributed a passive role to the ex-rebels. As a result of this man's action, they were unable to show what they had decided. It suggested that the civilians are the ones who decide what happens between the two groups. They are the ones who determine whether there are barriers or not (or how many of them have already been removed); they are the ones who are stretching out their hand. Especially at the beginning of the workshop, the ex-rebels talked about how they feel discriminated against, how they fear for their children who also suffer from discrimination, and how the civilians fail to accept that they did not join the LRA voluntarily. Now, it seems that the civilians are completely unaware that the ex-rebels also need to make concessions to them and have certain expectations of them.

Thus, it is not surprising that the ex-rebels protested against this removal of the whole barrier – apart from one chair – and told the researcher, who was the instructor, that they had decided to remove only one object. They explained this to the instructor because, as we hypothesize, a) they had complied with the proposed rule (i.e. acted in a disciplined manner), and b) they felt that she understood them better than the civilians in respect of the barriers that are not easy to remove. In order to understand the decision of the civilians, we would refer to our assumption that their urgent desire for harmony could be due to their repressed fear of the ex-rebels. It could also be a way of dealing with their own feelings of guilt because they were not abducted, or because they had been unable to protect the children who were abducted. We can also assume that the outsiders, or those who have suffered extreme traumatization, are not only more strongly aware of the gap between them and the civilians, but can also judge it more realistically, since they are confronted with it every day.

4 Family histories and life stories of former members of the Lord's Resistance Army[1]

Artur Bogner, Gabriele Rosenthal & Josephine Schmiereck

4.1   Introduction

In this chapter, the focus lies on the family histories and life stories of returned former child soldiers. We ask to what extent the returned former child soldiers, their children born in the "bush", and the civilians in the villages who were not recruited or enslaved by the rebels are able to adapt themselves to life in times of peace, and whether they are able to come together again as families, households, local communities or kin groups. How do they live today with the psychological effects of decades of civil war and atrocities carried out not only by members of the LRA, but also by government soldiers or, for instance, cattle raiders and rebel groups from neighboring countries or districts? How do they deal with their own physical and psychological injuries, and with the dead, missing, or physically and mentally wounded members of their families, households, kin groups and local communities? In particular we may ask how former child soldiers, who have lived for years under harrowing conditions "in the bush", are able to deal with the extreme traumatizations[2] which they suffered in the past, and often still suffer from in the present, and with the diverse consequences of these traumatizations. And how do their families react to

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[1] This chapter is a revised version of Bogner et al. 2017.

[2] On the term 'extreme traumatization', see footnote 11 in ch. 3.

the return of their adult children who often appear as strangers to them? The civilians in Acholiland know about the atrocities which the "returnees" have not only witnessed but often been made to carry out themselves, and were often themselves victims and witnesses of such atrocities. Fearing for their own lives, they had to watch helplessly as their terrified children were abducted, or killed before their eyes – often in most cruel and inhumane ways. They experienced how the LRA plundered their compounds and how their relatives were murdered in the most brutal fashion. For their part, the abducted children and adolescents look back on a past in which neither the clan elders nor their own parents were able to protect them from violent abduction. They had to live with the knowledge that running away or returning to their families could be extremely dangerous, due to the vehement threats by the LRA that revenge would be taken on their families. While they were with the LRA, they suffered extreme hardships (hunger, cold and exhaustion, as well as attacks and bombardments by government soldiers and allied rebels from southern Sudan). Generally speaking these were conditions of extreme traumatization. Very frequently they were forced either to murder fellow captives of their own age, or near relatives (during raids on their compounds or villages) or to watch them being murdered (see Blattman/Annan 2010: esp. 133–139, 141). The sometimes ritualized killings of civilians and other abductees were often combined with torture and subsequent desecration of the corpse.[3] Thus, the children and adolescents had to take part in horrific killings, were forced to eat while sitting on rotting corpses, or to cut up, roast and eat parts of dead bodies.[4] This was intended to intimidate the abductees, to deter them from escaping, and to cut their ties to their families and home communities. On their return, the abducted child soldiers found a civilian population that treated them as strangers because of their years with the LRA. And the returnees themselves felt estranged from their families and from everyday reality in the villages or towns.

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[3] Blattman/Annan (2010) note with a kind of relief that in their quantitative study 'only' around 8% of the respondents said they were made to kill relatives or friends. Even if this figure corresponds to the facts, any relief over this 'low' value – low in relation to the expectations of the authors – would be highly problematic from a methodological point of view, and a professional mistake from a psychological perspective. Although it is laudable to make a quantitative study of the crimes of the LRA, it is doubtful to interpret the results as representing experienced reality. Already the idea that accurate information can be obtained about the number of atrocities committed by simply asking the (potential) perpetrators, or by means of a questionnaire, is extremely unrealistic. This may be a good way to obtain important information concerning plausible lower limits for realistic estimates, but the results do not permit precise conclusions about the real scale of such phenomena. In view of the authors' comparatively well-founded estimate of up to 66,000 abductees in the central north of Uganda alone, it seems to us that their relief is principally the expression of a discourse that has for some time prevailed among academics, which strives to present the LRA as a rebel group like almost any other.

[4] These things were reported in several interviews, by abductees and non-abductees. Two of the ex-soldiers told us how much they still suffered from these experiences, which they regularly re-lived as flashbacks.

To this day a kind of divide can often be observed between the former child soldiers and the civilian population, including family members who were not abducted. They find it difficult to bridge this divide emotionally and exercise great caution when interacting with each other.

However, these difficulties in relations with the former child soldiers are seldom discussed in prevailing discourses on the LRA in Acholiland, and therefore cannot be adequately dealt with. Rather, public discourses, and to a large extent also local and intra-familial discourses (see chapter 3 in this volume), focus on the generous amnesty law that was enacted for members of the LRA and other armed rebels in Uganda (see Finnström 2008; Pham et al. 2007: 34–38). In these discourses, emphasis is laid on the much publicized "culture of reconciliation" of the Acholi that is often described in very generalized and very idealizing terms; they also involve accusations against the government, and concealed or open admiration for the LRA leader, Joseph Kony, or at least strong expressions of empathy for him. The attitude of the local people to the returned child soldiers, who almost always constituted the majority of active LRA fighters, is much less empathic and less willing to forgive.[5] Rather, it fluctuates between the observation that returned child soldiers are very disciplined and hard-working and anxious to integrate themselves, and accusations that they are possessed by bad spirits ("cen"), aggressive and emotionally unstable.

Our analysis of the interviews we conducted, especially the family interviews, indicates that this discourse blocks the dialogue not only between the former child soldiers and the civilian population in general, but also between them and their families, especially their families of origin, their parents and their siblings. The attribution of responsibility to the government is also bound up with the fact that the question of the responsibility or guilt of the parents (and their historical generation) toward their abducted children, who were forced into the role of rebel soldiers or became victims of their acts of violence, is discussed neither in academic and mass-media discourses, nor in everyday discourses. Even the returned child soldiers do not formulate, either explicitly or between the lines, the question of the responsibility of the Acholi adults for this long civil war and their abduction. In a similar way the responsibility or guilt of the LRA leaders toward the civilians abducted, forcibly recruited, enslaved, killed or wounded by them is often mentioned only implicitly (or assumed) and is not discussed in the proper sense of the word in the media and the academic literature.[6]

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[5] The survey conducted by Pham et al. among the local population shows little difference between attitudes to the LRA leaders and to returned child soldiers. In our opinion, however, this finding reveals merely the surface of the dominant discourse (Pham et al. 2007: 34ff.).

[6] As can be seen in the academic literature – quite clearly, for example, in Finnström (2012) – this does not mean that the culpability of the LRA leaders is accepted as obvious (see Allen 2006: 83–88, 138–141). In view of the unambiguousness of Finnström's other political value judgements and his language, the meaning of this cautious attitude is clear.

Our analyses in respect of the prevailing discourses, the experienced past, and living in the present with this past, are based on biographical-narrative and focused narrative interviews (see Rosenthal 2003, 2018: chapter 5; Schuetze 2008) and group discussions with former child soldiers who have now reached adulthood, with members of their families and of the non-abducted civilian population, and with experts from NGOs. The interviews and group discussions were conducted by Artur Bogner and Gabriele Rosenthal in the course of four joint field trips generally lasting about two months in the period between the summer of 2011 and January 2016.[7] The aim of this field research, which included participant observation, was to reconstruct what the people in Acholiland have experienced concretely or personally, and how they deal today with the consequences. In connection with the extreme traumatization of former child soldiers or civilians we deliberately speak of consequences, and not of 'Post Traumatic Stress Disorder' (PTSD), because "PTSD diagnosis focuses on the symptoms without reference to the cause of these symptoms" (Becker 2004: 3). Becker problematizes in particular that "PTSD provides a list of frequently occurring symptoms; however, it ignores many others" (ibid.). Our goal is to employ biographical and family-history case reconstructions – on the basis of concrete single cases – in order to reveal the *experienced* life histories of the interviewees, their concrete distressing and traumatizing experiences, the psychic and biographical consequences of the civil war in interplay with other stressful experiences, and how the present situation is experienced (see Rosenthal 2004, 2006). We do not focus on any particular phase, but reconstruct family and individual experiences before the children were abducted, during their time with the LRA rebels, and after their 'return'. Borrowing the concept of sequential traumatization from Hans Keilson (1992/1979), we understand sequential and extreme traumatization as an intertwining of different traumatic sequences, in other words as a long-term process which does not end, or not necessarily, when the person returns to civilian life. Keilson pointed out that a difficult time after suffering from violence can lead to continued and aggravated traumatization. It is also important to consider the phase before the manifest traumatization. In many of the families interviewed by us, it is clear that they had been through extremely difficult and traumatizing phases before the abduction of their children, that family members were recruited (or under 'moral' pres-

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[7] Biographical-narrative interviews, each covering between two and five sessions, were conducted with seventeen former child soldiers and thirty-two members of their families. In addition, twelve thematically focused interviews with members of the civilian population and experts, nine group discussions (six with former child soldiers and 3 with non-abducted inhabitants of Acholiland) and ten family interviews were carried out. During the first field trips we worked with Geoffrey Okello as translator and field assistant, and during the 2015/2016 trip with George Ochan as his successor. He was prepared for the job by G. Okello and introduced to the persons interviewed hitherto, so that he could help to conduct further interviews. We are most grateful to both of them for their loyal and competent assistance.

sure) by other rebel groups before the time of the LRA, or had traumatizing experiences in the government army; we even met families in which the grandfathers had been recruited by force by the British army in the two world wars. Moreover, many former child soldiers had experienced a very difficult childhood before their abduction, often because their parents or other family members were prone to "domestic" violence and extensive alcohol consumption.

In the following, we will discuss the cases of three former child soldiers in order to show three contrasting trajectories of 'reintegration', one problematic and two more promising. The case of 'Johann and his family' is representative of a family of a former child soldier which barely supports the returnee and refuses to let him return to the family compound. Johann himself has considerable problems in civilian life. In addition, his family seems prone to violence and alcohol abuse, and is struggling with the consequences of clan or family feuds. By contrast, Sancho and his "cousin" Maria represent two cases of returnees with more intact families and comparatively successful reintegration courses, despite the fact that both of them stayed with the LRA several years longer than Johann, and identified themselves much more strongly with the LRA and/or its commanders. Maria and Sancho have positioned and established themselves comparatively successfully in the local society of Acholiland, and in Sancho's case also in the government army (i.e. in the formal organization of the Ugandan state).

4.2 Johann and his family: Living alone in the town, with no contact with his father's family and little contact with his mother's family

The case of 'Johann and his family'[8] is an example of sequential traumatization, in which the difficult course *after his return* from the LRA served to aggravate the effects of the extreme traumatization during his time with the LRA. Johann was abducted when he was about ten or twelve,[9] lived with the LRA for several years (from about

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[8] G. Rosenthal conducted the first interview with Johann in Gulu in summer 2011; two more interviews followed in December 2014 and December 2015. In addition, in January 2015 Johann took part in a group discussion with two other former child soldiers (see ch. 5 in this volume). Four family interviews were conducted by G. Rosenthal in the compound of his mother's family in a village near Gulu in December 2015 and January 2016. All the interviews were conducted in Luo. Three and a half years passed between the first and the second interview with Johann, but nevertheless Gabriele Rosenthal quickly related to Johann again on an emotional level; in the meantime he had also learned a little English. All four meetings in the compound of his family were suggested and arranged by Johann.

[9] Johann says at one point that he was abducted when he was ten, and on another occasion he says he was twelve. In view of the fact that he was abducted when he was in fifth grade, at a time when very few children from the villages were able to attend school regularly, we think it is more likely that he was twelve. It is important to remember that ages and dates given by interviewees are nearly always

2000 to 2005/6), and had no further schooling or training after his return. For this reason, he is practically unable to read and write. Since 2007 he has lived alone in economically very precarious conditions and with no support from his family in Gulu, the district capital. After his return Johann first spent six months in the reception center of the *Kitgum Concerned Women's Association* (KICWA) in Kitgum, and after this was taken to Gulu to the GUSCO reception center (*Gulu Support the Children Organization*), which he left after a month. After this he stayed for only a few weeks in the compound of his maternal grandmother. His father and his mother are dead, because Johann was forced to kill them about one or two years before his return on the orders of his commander, who was a relative on his mother's side. His father's family refuses to have any contact with Johann, and his position in his mother's family is extremely precarious and weak. His uncle Frank (born in 1962), the eldest brother of his mother and head of the compound, says that he took on responsibility for Johann after his return, and regards himself as Johann's father (in Luo: *baba*). Traditionally this form of address is used to show respect for an uncle who has assumed the role of guardian, but Johann refuses to use it. At our first joint meeting, Johann introduced Frank as his uncle (in Luo: *omin mama na*). We will therefore also refer to Frank as his uncle. In the first interview Johann had spoken about his mother's three brothers, and told us that Frank sometimes invited him to the compound. According to Johann, Frank is the one with whom he has the most contact; he says that another of his mother's brothers lost his senses after his wife killed their children, and he has no contact with the third brother. However, he has problems with Frank, too; this was particularly so during the time he spent in the compound. Like his sons and the other men in the compound, Frank was frequently very drunk. Johann says that during the time he spent in the compound after his return, Frank, when he was drunk, often called him a rebel with a "bush mentality" and used other similar insults. In the first family interview, Frank himself boasts that he was abducted himself several times, but each time succeeded in escaping shortly afterwards,[10] thus implying that it is Johann's own fault that he had to stay with the LRA for such a long time.

After staying in the compound for a few weeks, Johann moved to Gulu and explains his departure in the individual interview as follows:

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guesses on their part. In the case of ex-child soldiers, such figures are usually based on the information they gave to humanitarian organizations or state authorities soon after their return, and which was noted for instance on their amnesty cards. These data often contradict information given by them on other occasions, or by their relatives. These difficulties are probably not unconnected with the (relatively) poor quality of the schools in northern Uganda.

[10] Since the LRA had abducted him only for the purpose of carrying plundered goods – as he admits himself – it would be truer to say that they 'let him go' rather than that he 'escaped'.

> "I left GUSCO on my own after a long time and went home, they saw me but were not happy with me ... after drinking they utter bad words, saying I should leave, I have killed **my mother**, in that way I see no support." (Interview 1)[11]

However, no one in the family says anything about this. His grandmother says that Johann was afraid that the LRA might come to attack the family compound again, that he felt safer in Gulu, and decided to move there for this reason. But, conversely, it could well have been the family that felt safer without him.

Here, we must remember that the LRA still operated in Uganda up to 2006 and for a considerable time the people continued to fear renewed attacks in Acholiland. Johann's grandmother and his social grandfather (the younger brother of his maternal grandfather) also explained to us that today they were still afraid that their neighbors might come with claims for compensation, since they did not know whether Johann had attacked compounds of their neighbors during his time as a rebel. Our analyses of the family interviews show that even in 2016 they are reluctant to let Johann return to their compound and – as will be discussed below – that this is connected with their rejection of his claim to land. Johann's mother had bought land near the district capital of Masindi, which was taken after her death by one of her sisters, who lives there today and cultivates the land.

Johann has lived alone in Gulu since about 2007. His first job was with a carpenter, but he had to leave it after it became known that he had been with the LRA because he increasingly experienced discrimination, and because people ascribed him a "bush mentality" and that he was possessed by "bad spirits". He was also afraid that the wife of his boss would kill him because she repeatedly accused him of theft.[12] Since 2014 he has worked as assistant to another carpenter. He is not paid a wage; instead, his employer feeds him and pays the rent for a tiny mud brick house. At weekends Johann earns a little money with a borrowed boda boda (a motorcycle taxi).

For a time he had a girlfriend, but she left him in fall 2014 when she heard about his past. She shared the common opinion that returned child soldiers were possessed by bad spirits:

> "The issue reached her home. So the girl told me I was from the bush that I have bad spirit over my head and so on. So she decided we have to separate."

Johann said that this made him more determined to hide his past in der LRA, and, for the time being at least, not to enter into new relationships.

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[11] We quote (without corrections) from G. Okello's and G. Ochan's written translations of the passages originally spoken and transcribed in Luo. See appendix for transcription symbols.

[12] The newspapers often contain reports of lynchings, a practice which is common in Uganda (see Schlichte 2005: 103–105).

On the consequences of sequential traumatization. The reconstruction of the life history of this former child soldier, confronted us with the challenge of how to interpret the very contradictory facts, especially concerning his two families of origin and his family relationships. We have met Johann eight times, and each time he made a very different impression on us: sometimes responsive and concentrated, sometimes absent and withdrawn. Sometimes Gabriele Rosenthal was able to converse with him a little in English, and sometimes he understood no English at all. This bewildererd not only G. Rosenthal, but also our research assistant George Ochan, who acted as translator in the last individual interview with Johann and in all family interviews with his relatives. His relatives also spoke of his passivity, lethargy, mental absence, and especially his forgetfulness. For them Johann was "disturbed in his head" and they asked the German researcher for medicines that might cure this problem. However, his relatives – especially his uncle Frank and his social and biological grandfathers, but less so his grandmother – were also contributing to the contradictory presentation of family events and dates. In the first family interview, at which Johann was present, things were said – such as that he first lived with his paternal grandmother after returning from the LRA – which were then revoked in the next family interview. His social grandfather (whose voice obviously carries little weight in the compound) is presented as his biological grandfather, and, surprising even to Johann, in the fourth family interview another elderly man, who in the first interview had been presented by Johann as his uncle, turned out to be his biological grandfather.[13] A certain authority is still accorded to him, but he was criticized in his presence for abandoning his first wife and her eight children when the youngest child was still a baby, and at a time when the LRA was very active in his region of origin, at the beginning of the 1990s, going to join his second wife in Gulu, an area safer from attacks by the LRA. His youngest daughter, who was present at the interview, said with undisguised aggression that he had let his family down. Frank caused further confusion when he said that Johann had to kill his parents very soon after his abduction, but that he himself had heard this only after Johann's return. By contrast, in a later family interview the grandmother told us in detail about taking part in the burial ceremonies for Johann's parents, which took place immediately after their murder, at a time when Johann had already been with the rebels for several years.

Our analysis of the family interviews shows clearly that the serious problems in Johann's maternal family, including alcohol abuse, violence committed by husbands against their wives, the return of daughters and their children to the compound because of violent husbands, and clan disputes, are covered up, and Johann is made a symptom bearer by his relatives (though probably unintentionally and without being aware of it). They argue that he is mentally disturbed, that the souls of the dead have

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[13] G. Ochan also found this extremely confusing because it did not correspond to the kinship terminology customarily used by the Acholi.

not yet been reconciled, and that he could be dangerous, especially if he were to drink alcohol.

However, this cannot disguise the fact that Johann is clearly suffering from the effects of extreme traumatization. He speaks himself of his inner restlessness, his fears, his distressing nightmares and fantasies (or flashbacks). Especially in the three family interviews at which Johann was present, it was evident that he has learned to use the defense mechanism of dissociation, which is helpful in extreme situations.[14] He was then *only physically present* and G. Rosenthal had to call him back into the conversation by addressing him loudly by name: "Johann, did you hear that?" Johann showed big memory gaps and tried to cover them up by thinking up answers to the interviewer's questions which resulted in great inconsistencies. This was different in longer narrative passages in the individual interviews with him, in which he was not interrupted by the interviewer, following the rules of a narrative interview.

Thus, the long biographical narration at the beginning of the first interview contains the smallest number of contradictions, and the information tends to correspond to what he experienced – at least according to our careful analysis of all the available data relating to this case. We interpret this phenomenon as a clear indication that a stream of narration helps the process of remembering. Especially with traumatized people, questions such as "How old were you when…?" or "Which grandmother did you live with?" not only interrupt the remembering process, but also make remembering difficult (see Rosenthal 2003). In order to hide this from the listeners, the person may then give answers which he or she is not really sure about. Just like the dissociative sequences in conversations in the present, the inconsistencies and gaps in Johann's memory must be interpreted as a consequence of his sequential traumatization (see von Hinckeldey/Fischer 2002: 24ff.; Streeck-Fischer 2014), which in Johann's case includes his experiences before he was abducted. Traumatized people not only often find it difficult to remember their traumatizing experiences, or certain parts of these experiences, but in many cases they also cannot remember phases before or after the traumatizing experience, and other thematically associated experiences.

Let us take a closer look at Johann's life course.

Johann's life before his abduction. Johann was probably born in 1990 – or one or two years earlier – in the district of Gulu. His parents belong to the ethnic grouping of the Acholi. His mother's family is nominally 'Catholic' but continues to observe the beliefs and rules of their local 'African' religion. Traditional Acholi customs

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[14] Dissociation makes it possible to 'dream oneself' out of a difficult situation, or to be as unaware of it as possible by conjuring up fantasies during or after the traumatizing experience, in order to strip it of its reality (see Overkamp 2002; Putnam 1997). A person who repeatedly suffers traumatizing events tends to learn the mechanism of dissociation (see Lynn/Rhue 1994; Terr 1991: 16). However, for the persons concerned it is problematic that they resort to this mechanism unconsciously and have little control over it.

and rituals, or the way they are interpreted in the interests of the family, are repeatedly referred to in the interviews with members of Johann's family, for instance to explain the rules of economic compensation for victims of a crime, or to justify why they have not yet been able to carry out a reconciliation ritual. Frank tells us that his sister (Johann's mother) was not properly married. Unfortunately we did not learn exactly what this means and whether it perhaps only means that the full bridewealth ("bride price") had not been paid (a circumstance which applies to most traditional marriages in the Acholi grouping and is repeatedly thematized during disputes).

Johann seems to be the only surviving child of his mother. He grew up in a village near Gulu.[15] When he was about six, Johann started attending a government primary school near Gulu, close to his mother's village of origin. After some time Johann changed to another nearby government school.[16] Johann explicitly names these two schools, and it is important to him to underline that he went to these schools.

In the family interviews there were indications that Johann's mother often changed her place of residence. A few months before Johann's abduction she moved to a place near Masindi (the capital of the district of the same name), bought land there, and intended, as he says, to fetch Johann and put him in the local school there. However, his father stayed in the village which is close to the compound of his mother's family. One explanation why his mother went away is that she fled from the attacks of the LRA and from an LRA commander who is related to her (see below), and sought a place to live where she felt that she and her son might be safe.

Johann's time with the LRA. In the year 2000, aged somewhere between ten and twelve, before he had completed grade five – as he says himself – Johann was abducted by LRA rebels under the leadership of a commander related to him on his mother's side. This event took place at night in the place where he went to school, on the occasion of a visit to his mother's family. The commander, whom Johann always refers to by name and whom we refer to here as 'Commander A', had already visited his father's compound a few weeks earlier and had beheaded a brother of his mother, who was there on a visit. Johann witnessed this situation, in which 'Commander A' announced: "everyone in your home must be killed" (Interview 3). Johann speaks about this man in all interviews and explains that this commander

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[15] Johann frequently and consistently mentions place names, including in respect of his time with the LRA. We do not give these names for reasons of data protection.

[16] In Uganda children attend primary school for seven years. As a rule, no fees are charged. People often speak of having difficulties paying the school fees, but probably what they mean is the money they have to pay for school materials, uniforms and for 'gifts' to staff members. For more information on Uganda's school system, see https://www.theguardian.com/katine/2010/feb/08/education-system-explainer (accessed: 13 February 2017).

wanted to take revenge on him and on his mother because of a family feud.[17] Thus, some time after this murder, 'Commander A' invaded the compound of Johann's mother's family together with other rebels. Johann, his older female cousin with her baby and his younger male cousin were forced to go with them, but the others were left behind after a short time because of their physical weakness. In the following days and nights the group walked to Okidi which is about 85 kilometers to the north-east. How long the group stayed there is not clear. On one occasion Johann says they camped there for three months, and another time he says they moved on after four weeks. Such uncertainties or inconsistencies are not surprising, for the ability to remember is often affected under such conditions (see Rosenthal 1995: 78ff.): it was an extremely difficult phase in which Johann was in permanent danger of his life, and in which there was no regular daily routine. The group often marched all night and ate only when circumstances allowed.

In the months following his abduction, the boy Johann was 'trained as a soldier' in accordance with the ideas of the LRA. This included carrying corpses, cooking and eating parts of corpses, or having to watch other abductees being punished and killed in cruel and horrific ways, because they were suspected of wanting to escape. He himself was several times forced to commit cruel murders. Johann ascribes this to 'Commander A', his immediate superior, who in the first days forced him to torture or to maim and kill a female civilian. Johann says that he had to punish this woman who was tied to a tree because she had lied about the presence of government soldiers in the area. He was made to cut off her nose, her lips and an arm with a knife; then he had to put a gag in her mouth and leave her behind with her injuries. When asked by the interviewer, he said that this was the first time he was forced to kill somebody. He probably assumes that the woman died as a result of her injuries. It is also possible that she was maimed until she was dead. Former child soldiers we interviewed repeatedly told us stories of being ordered by the commanders to mutilate their comrades, other abductees or civilians slowly and painfully until they were dead. As will be shown below, Johann himself talks about such a case in connection with the murder of a girl abductee.

In the following period, Johann went with his group to an LRA camp in the Sudan, where, in an initiation ritual, he was officially admitted as a soldier by the leader of the LRA, Joseph Kony.[18] He was then sent repeatedly on raids in various

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[17] In the interviews we conducted in West Nile, 'private feuds' or 'personal vendettas' were also sometimes mentioned as explanations for violent attacks by rebels against civilians. This kind of explanation makes it easier to reconcile these attacks with the collective we-image prevailing in West Nile. It also permits the rebel leaders to play these acts down as showing a lack of discipline on the part of single individuals among the rebel fighters, instead of as part of a strategy meant to intimidate and control the civilian population.

[18] At the beginning of the 1990s, the LRA increasingly moved into Sudan to find a retreat from the Ugandan government army. In 2005 it began retreating into the Democratic Republic of the Congo, after the UPDF had been given permission in 2002, in accordance with an agreement between Kampala

parts of Uganda and southern Sudan. On these raids there were further incidents involving the killing or maiming of other abductees or civilians. In the first interview with him conducted by G. Rosenthal in 2011, Johann listed in chronological sequence – with the help of questions put by the interviewer – the murders he was made to commit, and spoke of the first, second, third and fourth murder. He referred to the murder of his parents as the fifth and sixth murders. This enumeration was aided by the interviewer, but it may also have been produced by the interviews conducted with him at the GUSCO reception center, where he was asked to list all the murders committed by him in chronological order. This structuring may have helped him in the process of remembering this time. He apparently had a need to speak about the deeds he had committed. The list of murders shows, for instance, that *Johann does not subsume the killing of disarmed government soldiers under the category of murder*. The actions which he refers to as murders are those that he had to commit under the threat of being killed himself if he refused.

The reader will probably wonder why the forced murders are described in detail here, instead of being referred to briefly. The fact is that if we want to understand and explain the present situation of former child soldiers, it is not enough to simply diagnose the consequences of traumatization. In order to understand these consequences, in order to understand what concrete experiences former child soldiers continue to be haunted by in their fantasies and dreams, and which concrete fears and guilt feelings they have to struggle with, it is necessary to reconstruct what they experienced with the LRA. Moreover, in our opinion it is necessary to show the excessive cruelty of the LRA practices in order to counter the partly apologetic discourse on the LRA in the social science literature. Not only within the grouping of the Acholi is the behavior of the top LRA leaders, and especially Joseph Kony, played down, as if the LRA is a 'normal' rebel group like almost any other in the world. Apparently out of a kind of habitual black-and-white thinking, many of the publications by observers and humanitarian aid workers from abroad comply with an apologetic discourse on the LRA perpetrators who – following a well-known pattern – are stylized as victims of the circumstances of their socialization (for example Baines 2009; the title of the successful book by Sverker Finnström is programmatic: *Living with Bad Surroundings*). On the occasion of the arrest of the LRA "General" Dominic Ongwen in January 2015, this tendency to virtually glorify the perpetrators took on grotesque form in a publicly visible manner. Ongwen, one of the highest military commanders of the LRA, notorious for his cruelty, who himself was abducted in his youth, was presented in the Ugandan media as a mixture of Jesus Christ and Che Guevara (see for example the pictures in the *Daily Monitor* of 8th January 2015: 6, and 27th January 2015: 4). But also in academic discourses on the LRA fighters, most of whom were abducted as minors, there is a noticeable tendency

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and Khartoum, to fight the LRA across the border to Sudan in the context of the Ugandan army's 'Iron Fist' operation (Schomerus 2007: 10).

to play down reality, for instance by using the term "war-affected children" in preference to "child soldiers", which in this case is itself a euphemism. Typical of LRA-apologetic argumentation is trusting acceptance of the claim that the LRA leaders have a (rational) "political" agenda, without making a critical examination of the relationship between the means and the ends, or the credibility of these ends (see several of the articles in Allen/Vlassenroot 2010a). The way some authors, such as Titeca (2010) and Mergelsberg (2010), resort to a *purely functionalist* (and sometimes purely military) concept of rationality[19] in this context, says a lot. Another feature of the *Acholi-centered* discourse, which is nearly always influential here too, is the tacit (and quite unjustified) reduction of "northern Uganda" to Acholiland. Apart from anything else, this de-emphasizes the fact that the LRA's violence has caused considerable suffering in regions and ethnic groupings of northern Uganda which are neither Acholi nor typical allies of Museveni's government.[20]

On the other hand it should not be forgotten that the majority of the victims of LRA violence have been members of the Acholi civilian population. This circumstance is often disregarded or even denied by the discourse prevailing among "critical" scholars and parts of the Ugandan opposition, even though it is (or, as we think, should be) fundamental to any political assessment or analysis of the LRA. Here, it is remarkable that very few academic authors seriously consider the possibility of "violence" gaining a relatively independent existence, as an interactive, *social* process, or of the combatants becoming virtually independent from their social background or milieu of origin – a phenomenon of which the LRA is a clear example (see for instance Koloma Beck/Schlichte 2014: 132–144; Elwert 1997; Kuzmics/Haring 2013: chapter 7).

Johann was forced to commit the second murder about which he talks about a year after his abduction, when he was somewhere between eleven and thirteen years old. Together with others he had to kill a female comrade who was accused of theft and of preparing to escape. The group was ordered to cut off parts of her body very slowly and in an incredibly painful way until she was dead. A third forced murder followed during a raid on a village in the district of Lira, during which the victim tried to defend himself with an axe. Johann was then made to kill him with this axe. He explains why he was chosen for this among the members of the group, in a legitimation of LRA practices that is also given by other interviewees:

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[19] Here we refer to a relation between ends and means that remains strictly within the limits of the goal of self-preservation *of the organization as such* and, of course, its military success against the government army. (Ultimately this goal may, or should by necessity, also include the internal integration or social cohesion of the rebel group itself.) We do not refer to the terminology of "functionalist" thought in the social sciences.

[20] For a telling instance, see Finnström 2008: 248 - note 8. On the competing discourses on the LRA and their implications, see the very informative overview in Vorhölter 2014: 100–109, ch. 3 passim, and the acute analysis in Berntsen 2010: 43–52.

> "We were many but two of us were the young ones, you know, *kadogo*[21] are the ones given such jobs, when are just recruited they give to do such things to make you strong that you can later do it alone." (Interview 1)

When he says "you can later do it alone", he probably means that he later did such things alone.

Speaking about this phase, Johann says he took part in a massacre in a school in the region of Teso (i.e. in eastern Uganda and outside the customary area of settlement of the Acholi). He and his group attacked the school, killed teachers and children and hung up the dead on ropes. Johann justifies the massacre as follows:

> "We had been terribly fought and were very annoyed, so we would kill anybody we came across." (Interview 1)

From his words it is clear that he locates himself within the "we" of those who were willing in this situation to murder anyone they came across. This indicates a course in which he began to identify himself with the LRA (probably increasingly as time went on). It is to expect that persons (children or adults) who are caught in a situation where they are powerless and constantly in fear of their lives will start to identify themselves with their aggressors and with the organization that is holding them captive. This defense mechanism helps the victims of violent situations at the moment of the attack, and also has a life-preserving function in the subsequent insecure phase (see Reddemann 2001). The victim subjects himself to the aggressor, tries to guess what he expects, and to meet these expectations. As Anna Freud has shown (see A. Freud 1967/1936), this defense mechanism can mean aligning oneself with the aggressor in the sense of integrating his potential aggression into one's own structures of conduct, and in effect of 'copying' his violent behavior. In this way the victim seeks to avoid conflicts with the aggressor and to gain a feeling – if only a rudimentary one – of being in control of his or her own fate, however weak and unstable this feeling may be (for a discussion of this from a sociological perspective, see Popitz 2017: 19 - note 3).

Johann's process of identifying himself with the LRA was probably supported by the fact that he was promoted by Kony personally. Johann describes in detail the events that led to his promotion: in a battle near Awach (south-east of Patiko, about 20 km north of Gulu) he and his comrades had killed some government soldiers and captured a large number of weapons, with which they returned to Joseph Kony in the Sudan. This success was celebrated and Johann was appointed as a member of the escort of General Vincent Otti, Kony's deputy at that time. In addition, Kony offered Johann a wife as a reward for capturing the weapons (Interview 1). However, Johann turned this offer down and gives this reason in the interview: "but I declined because I was still young" (Interview 1).

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[21] The word *kadogo* means 'small' and is used to refer to child soldiers (Oloya 2013: 61).

The result of this promotion within the LRA – at least in Johann's perception – was that his relative, 'Commander A', became jealous and determined to treat him even more brutally. Among other things, he told Johann that he would force him to murder his parents.

This was realized in about 2004, when Johann was between 14 and 16 years old. 'Commander A' had probably heard that his mother was staying at this time in the compound of her husband. He threatened to kill Johann if he did not carry out the order to murder his parents. 'Commander A', Johann and another boy went to the compound. Johann was forced to kill first his mother and then his father. When the group entered his parents' house, his mother ran to him and wanted to embrace him. 'Commander A' wounded her with a spear and taunted her for wanting to embrace her son who was now no longer her son but a soldier. He beat the mother and wounded her with a bayonet. When Johann threw himself on her to protect her, 'Commander A' beat him unconscious with his rifle butt. When Johann came round, he tried to run away. He was caught, beaten and forced to kill his mother. Both he and his mother were blindfolded. He was forced to cut his mother's throat with a machete. Then the cloth was removed from his eyes. He had to look at his mother's corpse. To this day he dreams again and again of the murder of his mother.

Johann had to kill his father in the same way. Being forced to obey this cruel order was probably the nadir of his suffering while with the LRA. As noted above, Johann does not explain it as a war strategy of the LRA, but as a conflict within his mother's family. He repeatedly refers to the fact that 'Commander A' announced very early on that he would have to kill his whole family. He says:

> "The issue started long ago, that commander some time back killed two boys from our family, he abducts and kills them, that even me- I have been … well he wanted me to finish the family before he kills me himself."

In the family interviews, Johann also repeatedly referred to this relative. Yet neither his uncle Frank nor his grandmother, nor the two grandfathers showed any interest in talking about him. They quickly changed the subject or gave unclear, vague and contradictory answers to the questions put by the interviewer about the concrete conflict. On being asked by the interviewer who 'Commander A' was, the grand-mother explicitly said: "Just some kind of a foreigner, I do not know." In the third family interview, at which Johann talked about the murder of his parents, his family spoke about Johann's guilt. G. Rosenthal intervened in the family dialogue by suggesting that the adult commander who had forced the young Johann to do it was responsible for this deed. But this interpretation was vehemently rejected by Frank. As with all controversial topics, he appealed to an alleged Acholi 'tradition' and informed the interviewer that according to this tradition, a person who killed with his own hands was solely responsible for the murder. This was a very implausible statement, not least in view of the fact that many Acholi had been in the army since the early colonial period. Yet Frank went even further in his apologetic argumentation

in defense of the LRA leaders, referring to Kony, who ordered everything, "but he's so well". He said that there were people who suffer from "the effects of the action, but Kony is ok". According to this logic, 'strength' would be proof that someone is not guilty or is in the right, and (mental) weakness or illness would be proof of the opposite. From here it is not far to equating power with right, or 'strength' with virtue. Again, this construction made it possible to ascribe all the problematic aspects of the events to one or more rebel soldiers as individuals, while shielding the LRA's struggle, its methods and its leaders from any conceivable criticism.

According to this version, Johann alone is responsible for what he did. When the interviewer pointed out that Johann would have been killed if he had refused, Frank reacted by shrugging his shoulders and the others kept quiet. It was also problematic for Johann that nobody had explained the family conflict to him, which the older people in the family probably all knew about. Thus, the family succeeded in making Johann a symptom bearer, and in detracting attention from the conflict which probably dated back to before he was born. Uncle Frank commented:

"Sometimes when you tell him something, he forgets very quickly, let me be honest, this is like a disease" or "his brain is affected, it may be by bad spirits."

The phase following the killing of his parents and Johann's escape. Johann has only fragmentary memories of the time immediately after the killing of his parents, which we interpret as a consequence of this extremely traumatizing experience. This deed put an end to his hopes, which he had certainly still cherished up to this point, of returning to his parents and the rest of his family. He reports that after this he was at a place which he cannot remember with his group for a few months. Then they returned to Sudan, to a camp that was under the direct command of Kony. One or two years with the LRA followed, about which Johann hardly speaks. Rather, he jumps relatively quickly from an account of the murder of his parents to the story of his escape. We assume that the period after the murder of his parents was experienced by Johann as much more difficult than the preceding phase. Presumably in a condition of extreme traumatization, he perhaps experienced the following time as in a fog, and now, more than before, he was himself in danger of being murdered. On the one hand, 'Commander A' had explicitly threatened him with this, and on the other hand Johann had developed a certain closeness to one of the other child soldiers, whom he knew from his schooldays, which put him at risk. When this boy succeeded in escaping, Johann was accused of helping him and it seemed likely that he would be killed. At about this time, he managed to escape thanks to a heavy bombardment by government soldiers. In the individual interviews with him, Johann at first seems to produce several different versions of the exact circumstances of his escape. However, it is clear that his life was in danger in the period immediately before giving himself up to government soldiers near Kitgum.

After his escape, as noted above, Johann first spent six months in the reception center in Kitgum and then one month in the GUSCO in Gulu. With his transfer to Gulu he came close to his relatives, who at that time were still living in a nearby camp. He says that at that time it was still too dangerous for his relatives to travel to Kitgum, but they could have visited him in the GUSCO. Johann complains that in the four weeks he spent in the GUSCO he was visited only by a 'sister' (a younger sister of his mother) and his grandmother. He says that this aunt reproached him for murdering his parents. He also underlines several times that his family did not rejoice over his return. In the family interviews, however, we were told that several family members had visited Johann. We read Johann's version as an indication that he felt very lonely at that time. He says that there was nobody who felt responsible for him, and that for this reason he was not able to go back to school. If his parents had been alive, they would have paid his school fees for the secondary school. Frank registered his name as Johann's guardian at the reception center, but instead of helping him, he apparently pocketed a part of the money that was given to returned child soldiers by the GUSCO to help them start a new life. It seems that he took 150,000 shillings out of the total amount of 250,000 shillings.[22] Nevertheless, it was Johann's mother's family that at least helped him somewhat.

G. Rosenthal and George Ochan met the members of this family several times in one of their compounds. Taking a closer look at the course of these meetings will help us to explain why we think that detaching himself from his family would in a way liberate and empower Johann, and give him more energy to start a family of his own. However, given the often high degree to which individuals in sub-Saharan Africa are dependent (not least economically dependent) on their families and kin networks, this would not be easy for him.

The attitude of Johann's maternal relatives toward him. In the first and the second interviews with Johann, he repeatedly spoke of his loneliness and the way he suffered from the lack of support from his family. G. Rosenthal therefore suggested to him that they might go together to visit Frank. Johann agreed and after several failed attempts to arrange a meeting (in December 2014 and January 2015), in December 2015 Frank invited us to come to the compound of Johann's mother's family and a date was agreed on for an interview. However, several men of different ages turned up for the interview, all of whom Johann introduced to us as his uncles. Later it turned out that in addition to his uncle Frank, they were his biological grandfather, two of Frank's sons, and his social grandfather. Frank first recounted his own life story, concentrating on his suffering under the attacks of the LRA, before the conversation developed into a family interview in which the participants spoke about Johann's mother, about the still outstanding reconciliation or cleansing ritual, and

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[22] In 2005/2006 a sum of 250,000 shillings had an exchange value of about 100 euros (Oanda: https://www.oanda.com/lang/de/currency/historical-rates/ (accessed: 28 January 2018). At that time this corresponded roughly to the monthly pay of an ordinary soldier.

about attacks by the LRA on the compound, their own short-lived abductions and the abduction of other children. In this interview it was vehemently argued that Johann could not come to live in the compound because the necessary reconciliation ritual had not yet been carried out. This was not possible at that time because the spirits had not yet spoken. A statement made by the social grandfather was especially moving: he said that he felt deep pain over the death of his daughter, but he was happy that his grandson had returned alive. In the later interviews, too, G. Rosenthal and G. Ochan experienced this man as being more attached to Johann than the other men. It is for this reason that we refer to him here as the "social grandfather".

A short time after this interview, we interviewed Johann's grandmother. This was followed by another family interview – concentrated on Frank, his third wife, a son of Frank's from his first marriage (his first wife had already died), and Johann's social grandfather. Johann was not present at this interview, because he forgot it. The third family interview, in accordance with the request of the family after the second interview to learn more about Johann's time with the LRA, was concentrated on Johann and his past with the rebels. According to the participants, this was the first time that Johann spoke to his family about the murder of his parents and about the way he had endured unimaginable cruelties while with the LRA (such as having to eat parts of corpses). When his relatives asked him to say more about the other murders he referred to, the interviewer intervened and said that this would be too much in one interview. Present at this interview were Johann's grandmother, his social grandfather, Frank, Frank's second and third wives, Frank's daughter-in-law (who is the same age as his third wife), and two male cousins of Johann's, one of whom has been mentally disturbed since returning from the government army. In this interview there were first signs of an opening in the family dialogue for the idea that Johann could move into the compound of his mother's family, an idea that was first expressed by his grandmother. The fourth meeting with the family was therefore arranged partly in order to interview Johann's social grandfather, whom G. Rosenthal and G. Ochan had up to this point perceived as his biological grandfather and as being very attached to Johann, and partly to discuss with the family the possibility of Johann returning to the compound. However, the member of the family who has the most authoritative voice in such decisions, namely Frank, was unable to come, probably because he was in his room suffering from an excess of alcohol, as suggested not only by our driver and field assistant, but also by Johann when we talked to him later. Present were the two grandfathers, the grandmother, and her youngest daughter with a three or four year old son. In this interview, all the reasons why Johann should not be allowed to live in the compound were again repeated.

As became very clear in the course of the four family interviews, the family, or its powerful members, refuse to recognize Johann's right to land, and do not want him to move into their compound. This is based on the argument that the ritual, which could reconcile Johann with the souls of the dead, especially those of his parents, has not yet taken place, because the souls of the dead have not spoken. In

addition, they emphasize that the ritual must be initiated by Johann's paternal relatives, but that between the two families there is no contact, or that the paternal relatives refuse any kind of contact. It is important to realize that a ritual of the *mato oput* type is not only about reconciling Johann with the souls of those he has killed, but also about settling claims for compensation between the clans (or local groupings) concerned, and preventing acts of blood vengeance or self-administered justice, which is forbidden, but often practiced. The interviewer first heard the following version: in Johann's case the murderer, i.e. Johann, belongs to this family, and those he killed, namely Johann's mother and Johann's father, belong to both families, so that the ritual cannot be carried out because it is unclear who has to compensate whom. The fourth family interview was attended by Johann's biological grandfather, who lives in a different village and came especially for the occasion. In this interview, after insistent questions by the interviewer aimed at clarifying the claims for compensation, it was argued that Johann belongs to his father's family (this argument possibly reflects a position adopted in view of the failure of his father's family to pay the full bridewealth), and therefore compensation for the death of Johann's mother should be paid by his father's family. In this interview, the dynamic in respect of the question whether Johann can return to the compound of his mother's family and be given a place to build a mud brick house, takes an unexpected turn: his biological grandfather tells G. Rosenthal she should give Johann money to build a house. At the beginning of the interview, his grandmother had already said she would like her grandson to return. A subsequent interview with Johann was held a few days later. The following quotations are based on notes written from memory in German by G. Rosenthal shortly after the interview; they are therefore not verbatim quotations. Johann says to G. Rosenthal and G. Ochan:

> "They only want the money, they would let me built a house and live in it for a bit, and then they would say I had no right to land and chase me out of the compound."

In a very disillusioned tone, he adds:

> "They haven't bothered about me for more than ten years, why should they bother themselves now, they only said that because I came with a white woman, I have eaten with my friends, and they urged me not to go back to the village, they said they will take away your house, and if you live there with a wife and children, you will suffer from discrimination."

Johann also argues that he gets nothing from the family; on the contrary, they expect him to give them part of his earnings. We share Johann's opinion that his family is primarily interested in money. Above all we experienced the lacking emotional support. This is very evident at the end of the third family interview, in which Johann asked his family several times to forgive him. Each time there was icy silence among

those present. At the end of this interview, the interviewer asked Johann to repeat his request for forgiveness loudly again, and his uncle Frank answered: "We have heard it."

Johann's situation seems to be stuck. He wants to change his present situation, but it seems as if he has no realistic idea of how to set about this. He speaks of saving money and opening his own workshop, but in the context of his present employment, and above all his very obvious lack of drive, or apathy, this does not appear to be a realistic proposition. In the above-mentioned individual interview, however, he said for the first time very firmly and clearly that he wanted to build a life for himself in the town and he consulted our field assistant about whether he should borrow a motorbike, give up his job with the carpenter, and devote himself to making money with a motorbike taxi. G. Ochan, and our driver, who was present at this interview, encouraged Johann to do this.

Being a member of a Pentecostal church gives Johann a certain stability.[23] He regularly attends services and goes to pray in the church; after he had in vain asked his family to forgive him, he therefore reacted very openly to an intervention by G. Rosenthal who suggested that God can give him forgiveness. It seems to us that a further stabilizing moment for Johann is that because people in his parents' village know that he murdered them, he has not much need for information management regarding a secret past, but can speak more openly than other interviewees about the violent deeds he committed.

4.3   Sancho and Maria in the context of their families: Two trajectories showing a partially successful 'reintegration'

Sancho and Maria, who were both abducted by the LRA, are related to each other and were lovers at least in 2013 and 2014. Maria is the daughter of a sister of Sancho's father. However, it is sometimes argued that she belongs to a different patriclan, through her father's family. Their family and individual histories[24] are examples of trajectories which, in contrast to Johann's, led to a much greater degree

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[23] On participation in such fundamentalist Christian groups as a "coping mechanism" often found in former child soldiers of the LRA, see Hollander (2010: 73). In this context it is important that both the LRA and its predecessor, the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM), show distinct similarities to churches or groupings belonging to the Pentecostal movement or similar "charismatic Christians". Such religious groups have been popular among the Acholi for many decades (see for instance Allen 2006: 153, 32, 35).

[24] Artur Bogner conducted all interviews with them and their relatives in the Luo language with the help of two interpreters, G. Okello and G. Ochan. The first interview with Maria (spread over four meetings) and a biographical interview with her mother took place in December 2014 and January 2015. Another interview with Maria, two interviews with her mother's partner (who refers to himself as Maria's biological father), and another uncle (her mother's brother) followed in December 2015 and

of identification with the LRA, in Sancho's case especially with his commander; and both Sancho and Maria are examples of relatively successful reintegration in civilian life after their return. Sancho says that he was born in 1979 and was abducted in 1994 at the age of about 15 (although the stories he tells in the interview suggest that he was younger). He escaped in southern Sudan after about eight years – he says it was in February 2002 – with three other LRA rebels, and turned himself over to Sudanese troops. This was a short time before the Ugandan army began a major military offensive (termed 'Iron Fist') against the LRA bases in southern Sudan, under the terms of a peace agreement concluded with the Sudanese government in March 2002. This agreement laid down that LRA rebels who escaped in Sudan must be extradited to Uganda.

Maria was born somewhere between 1982 and 1984, and was abducted when she was about eleven. When she was about 13 she was forced to marry a much older LRA officer (about 60 years old), by whom she became pregnant. The child died when it was very young. After the death of her first husband, she was 'inherited' by an officer who was a relative of his and together they had a son. In spring 2002, only a short time after Sancho's escape, she was freed by the rebel organization with her son who was then about 18 months old, together with 43 other women and their small children.[25] They were freed on the orders of Kony's deputy, Otti Vincent, who wanted to be rid of the physically weak mothers and small children in what was a very difficult military phase for the rebels. During the interviews with Maria and Sancho and other ex-rebels, it became very clear that this offensive had a significant effect on the rebel group and was probably the most important cause of its withdrawal from Uganda.

Sancho and Maria had met in the "bush" then and now, but they belonged to different brigades. In the last interview with Maria, there is a suggestion that they had a love affair at this time already – probably after the death of Maria's first husband and after having been married to her second husband. The relevant passages are very confused and inconsistent. This is not surprising because at that time both would have been in danger of their lives if this had become known. It is a common feature of biographical interviews that autobiographers reproduce a way of speaking in the present that was required in a particular situation in the past (and often also

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January 2016. During the first conversation with Maria, Sancho came by to ask if Maria could lend him some money. As a result, a biographical interview was conducted with him on three successive days in December 2014. A fourth interview with him took place in December 2015. In addition, Sancho's second wife, with whom he lives, his father, his nephew and his "senior grandpa" (an older brother of his grandfather) were interviewed in December 2015 and January 2016.

[25] The account given by Maria and the time she mentions agree with reports in the media (see for instance an article in IRIN News (Nairobi, 14th of June 2002: Army bringing pressure to bear on LRA rebels)   http://www.irinnews.org/news/2002/06/14/army-bringing-pressure-bear-lra-rebels   (accessed: 13 October 2016).

in subsequent situations), when speaking about it or admitting the relevant facts was dangerous.

Before Sancho and Maria lived together as a couple, Maria first married another man after her return and had three children with him. Because of his violent behavior – including raping her when he was drunk – she left him with the support of her uncle (her mother's brother) and with Sancho's help (as he says himself) and had entered into a marriage-like relationship with Sancho by 2013 at the latest. At that time both of them wanted to marry or to enter into a levirate marriage. Sancho regards this marriage as his right. He also sees it as his right to take on the role of father for Maria's son, who was born during her time with the LRA. He says he would like to take care of this boy, as Maria is the widow of his deceased 'brother'. Maria's family is opposed to this idea and argues that their patriclans are too closely related and this would mean a breach of the exogamy rule.[26] According to Sancho's father, however, the real motive for this resistance is that Maria's mother or her family want to elicit the payment of bridewealth, or a higher amount. Nevertheless, up to 2015 Maria and Sancho lived together like a married couple. As Sancho puts it: "We stayed together as man and wife" (Interview 4). According to Sancho, he ended the relationship when he found Maria in bed with another man. Sancho, who had already been married twice and who had three children with his second wife, Anna, when he moved in with Maria, is now living again with Anna, who, like Maria, has a rented apartment in Gulu. At present Maria and Sancho, so they both tell the interviewer, are not lovers, but nevertheless they are in close contact, visit each other regularly, and evidently have a close, affectionate relationship. Our analysis of the interviews shows that this relationship, and above all the fact that they can talk to each other about their past in the "bush" gives both of them an emotional stability that should not be underestimated, and has helped them in their transition to civilian life.

Sancho and Maria, who were about 22 and 23, in other words adults, when they came from the "bush" (in contrast to Johann who was somewhere between 15 and 17), concentrated on starting families after their return, and enjoyed much better conditions for stabilizing their economic situation and economic independence. In particular, they were supported by their relatives – at least to a certain degree. In Maria's case it is a matter of being reintegrated in her maternal clan. For example, immediately after Maria's return, her mother helped her from time to time by taking care of her son who was born in the "bush". Maria's mother says explicitly in the interview: "Maria does not bring us shame" and underlines that Maria convinced her

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[26] The reference to Maria being the "daughter of a sister of Sancho's father" suggests that in this case the exogamy rule is not to be, or at least has not been, taken too seriously or does not apply, since the partners belong to different patriclans or patrilineages which may both belong to one superordinate "clan", but are nevertheless obviously able to intermarry. Moreover, it seems to be factually unclear which clan Maria belongs to (in a socio-classificatory sense), because disputed bridewealth payments, and thus disputed marital relationships and relationships of classificatory filiation, play a role here.

that she had not murdered anybody. Sancho's father tells that after his son's return he rented a house for him in Kitgum, because "there was still a high intensity of the rebels". Sancho recently joined the government army and therefore, as he says in the interview in December 2015, his financial situation is at present comparatively comfortable. Despite many disputes, problems and difficulties, he also has a much better contact with his family of origin than Johann and, unlike Johann, is invited to meetings of the 'elders' of his paternal village or kin grouping and is entitled to partake in their decisions. The meetings are organized by Sancho's father, who is an influential senior member of his local we-group and plays an important role when rituals are carried out.

Let us take a closer look at the life histories of Sancho and Maria.

Sancho's childhood and adolescence. Sancho was born in 1979, as the third of five children and as the second of two sons of his parents, in the family compound of his father in a village in the district of Pader, i.e. in a district northeast of the district of Gulu. After Sancho's birth his two younger siblings were born in quick succession. In sharp contrast to Johann, Sancho can give consistent information about his siblings, their birth years and the family constellation. We regard this as indicating more stable family relationships. The cultural capital in this family is probably also much bigger than in Johann's family; his father is educated, speaks English relatively well, and has (and probably has had for many years past) an influential position in his local community. It must be taken into account that his father went to school in the period preceding and following Uganda's independence. He is – and perhaps has been for many years – something akin to the secretary or interpreter of the local 'cultural leader', or of the clan or village elders.

Sancho's childhood is characterized by growing up together with five siblings and by a serious attack of meningitis he suffered at the age of about seven, in his second year at school. He describes himself as an obedient and "disciplined" child, and says that "I liked listening to my parents" (Interview 2). He says that he was very ambitious, hard-working and initially successful at school ("I personally liked studying"). His success at school was interrupted by his serious illness: he was taken to hospital, stayed there for a month and nearly died. His memories of this illness are still vivid, and he talks at length about it. Among other things, he reports that he lost consciousness several times, suffered from giddiness, and that after the acute phase of the illness he was in a greatly changed physical condition. As how threatening this illness was experienced by Sancho, and the degree to which he clearly remembers it to this day, is shown by a classic dream of death or a near-death experience in his dream, which Sancho narrates about in detail. He says that he dreamed of children who tried to push him into the water, and of men in white gowns.

He has some paralysis in his hands and feet as after-effects of his illness. In the interview he underlines that he was good at school before he was ill, but that his performance level dropped afterwards. Nevertheless, he continued to be a relatively

good pupil and was evidently respected by his classmates. He continued to be am-
bitious and tried hard to catch up with the others; among other things he was regu-
larly 'class monitor' up to the time of his abduction.

Abduction at the age of about 15. Sancho says that he was abducted in October
1994, at a time when he was living with his aunt (a sister of his father) near Kitgum,
together with four other children from the village (including a son of his aunt). Three
of the abducted children, including his cousin, managed to get away. Sancho and the
other boy, who did not escape, were beaten and then forced to destroy the houses,
the potato fields and the banana plants belonging to the families of the children who
escaped. One of the child soldiers involved in this work could hardly stand up after-
wards, and was beaten to death before their eyes. One of the three children who had
escaped was caught again after three days and Sancho, together with other recently
abducted children, had to beat him to death. Afterwards the corpse was beheaded.
Later on the same day, the group returned to the compound of Sancho's aunt and
there they recaptured his cousin who had escaped. While they were plundering the
compound, lighting a fire and eating, Sancho's cousin, who had been told he would
be killed afterwards, had to dance. After the meal, one of the young people living in
the compound was ordered to beat him to death and to cut off his head before the
eyes of his mother, Sancho's aunt. The first part of the order was carried out, he was
killed, but in this case his head was not cut off.

When narrating about the time of the abduction and the following years, Sancho
always refers to himself as a child. He evaluates his experiences in these first days as
follows:

> "So when I saw all those things I became so frightened and to think about es-
> caping was now very difficult." (Interview 1)

After attacking the compound of his aunt, the group set off in the direction of south-
ern Sudan. One of the people who abducted him was killed because he became un-
able to hide his physical weakness. Sancho himself was repeatedly beaten – some-
times with a machete (*panga*) – as punishment for eating some of the stolen food
that he was made to carry without permission. Thus, as for most of the abducted
children and adolescents, Sancho's experiences of the first days were determined by
a permanent fear of death which taught him: if you don't function well, if you don't
obey orders, or if you show any kind of weakness, then you must die, and often in a
horrible way.

After a first short meeting with Kony, his group was sent to a temporary camp
(which they had to build) between "cold rocks" in southern Sudan, where many of
them died within a short time from starvation or exhaustion. After this they moved
to Kony's main camp on the Sudanese border. His narrations about the welcome
ceremony, about Kony's promise that they would have more to eat in future, and

about his style of leadership, clearly reveal the beginning of a lasting identification with Kony and the LRA. Sancho describes his first meeting with Kony as follows:

> "On the day that I saw and knew that this is Kony I did not have any bad thoughts I saw him and thought that this is the Kony whose name is very famous Kony Kony Kony this is the one when we reached there we the new recruits he came himself to talk to us he thanked us for joining him he said a lot of things with prayers first the meeting started with prayers before he started to talk he talked a lot and taught us that the government was going to be overthrown … the teaching he was giving was that he wanted Museveni government overthrown that it was bad because that it was killing people and they should fight it …" (Interview 2)

The awe or deep respect which Sancho, speaking now as an adult, felt for Kony are clearly expressed here in the words:

> "This is the Kony whose name is very famous Kony Kony Kony this is the one."

These admiring words may be due not only to Sancho's predicament, but also to the fact that at that time Kony's name still had very positive connotations for the civilian population of Acholiland, in part because the abduction of children had not yet become the LRA's preferred method of recruitment.

However, in this situation Sancho was not particularly impressed by everything the rebel leader said because, as he says:

> "At that time when he addressed people the only thing that excited me was the issue of food because the level of hunger was unbearable so on that day ... that of all that Kony said I was happy about food ... so he had said within the next two weeks before two weeks elapse elapses there would be plenty of food and people would eat until they start belching." (Interview 2)

However, in the following months there was no improvement in the food supply, and in fact the situation got worse. One might expect that this would lead to disillusionment with regard to Kony, but this was not the case. On the contrary, Sancho assures the interviewer that he would have died without Kony's intervention. Together with other recruits he was sent for training to the new base with the "cold rocks", which was still being developed. The weeks spent here were again marked by extreme hunger, exhaustion, cold and death. Sancho says that three or four recruits died each day. It was Kony who ended this terrible situation which lasted for several months or many weeks:

> "When the death rate became so high, Kony ordered that the recruits were taken back because the recruits were going to get finished." (Interview 1)

Sancho and the other recruits returned to Kony's camp, and his situation then improved somewhat. He became an 'escort' for a deputy of Kony. His commander ordered that he should get more to eat. As this was still not enough and he was still hungry, Sancho – and three other recruits – ate poisonous roots, which led to hallucinations and complete exhaustion. In the LRA, this was a situation which could result in execution. But during the subsequent hearing with the four sick recruits, his commander discovered that he came from the same area as Sancho and knew his father. The commander gave orders that the "children" (Sancho uses this term to refer to himself and his fellow sufferers) should be given food and tea with milk. From this time on, the commander took him into his "fenced courtyard", where he was soon given the job of bodyguard. Here the commander lived with his five wives and their children: "From there is where I found life improved" (Interview 1). Up to when the commander died, probably from AIDS, in 1997, in other words after about three years, Sancho stayed with this family:

> "I stayed in his home for a long time while there at least my life was easy but he later lost his life." (Interview 1)

During this phase, however, he also experienced heavy fighting with Ugandan soldiers, and twice received serious head injuries from bomb or shell fragments.

After the death of his commander, Sancho's situation deteriorated considerably. He reports that *de facto* he had become the right hand of his deceased commander, and that the commander had promised to arrange a wife for him. Sancho indicates that after his death he occupied quite a low position in the hierarchy of the rebels, and was not given a wife because of "favoritism". He stayed in the "bush" for a further five years. In our four interviews with him, Sancho hardly speaks about this period, when he was much worse off than in the preceding years, and for instance was made to kill a civilian against his will. His detailed narrations of many situations which he experienced before the death of his commander are in stark contrast to his short report on the period between this and his escape in southern Sudan. The story of his escape is again told in great detail. He thus succeeds in giving the impression in the interview that the time between the death of his commander (1997) and his escape from the rebel group (February 2002) was relatively short. From what he says, it is clear that the period in between, which lasted over four years, was dominated by the consequences of the death of his immediate superior, which for him were negative: a 'loss of importance', or a fall, at least in the factual hierarchy of power chances within the rebel organization. He repeatedly compares this time unfavorably, explicitly and implicitly, with the previous phase when he was always close to his commander (in the Sudan). In these latter years, the rebels carried out many very violent attacks on civilians in Uganda and in Acholiland (see Atkinson 2010a: 292ff.). Sancho reports how they frequently attacked the compounds of escaped LRA rebels, killing their relatives, killing civilians who tried to run away, and carrying out 'punitive actions' against civilians who were accused of cooperating with the government;

such punishments included chopping off limbs, cutting off ears or lips, and putting their eyes out. He evaluates this phase as follows:

> "So things that I have been seeing are those ones and during that time we were moving to Uganda and back and what I saw are many that I had not experienced in my life." (Interview 1)

and:

> "Most of my life in the bush was just full of guns and bullets until I escaped." (ibid.)

Sancho tells about these years as if he were not involved in the actions himself, using formulations such as: "Sometimes they would issue order that they should kill" (Interview 1). His report is a justification for not having escaped earlier, since in his own words he was full of fear because of these experiences. Apart from the assumption that he is reluctant to speak about these years between 1997 and 2002 because they were dominated by intense violence against civilians, we also assume that the death of his commander, to whom he still feels very attached at the time of the interview, constituted a turning point and led to a break in his identification with the LRA. Sancho says explicitly and without hesitating that he would not have run away from the LRA if his commander had not died: "If X. (name of the commander) had not died I would not think of coming back" (Interview 2). The death of his commander probably meant that, without his protection, Sancho had to take part in atrocities much more often than in the preceding phase. From 1997 onward, this having-to-obey-orders was an effect of his weakened position within the formal ranks and factual power hierarchy of the LRA, and it corresponds to the way he describes this phase up to 2002, in which he no longer appears as an actor. With the death of his commander he had lost an influential advocate. His account contains no hints that he found another superior who played a similarly important, or similarly beneficial, role for him. In view of his relatively advanced age (about 18) at the death of his protector, this was probably a serious disappointment for him, especially in respect of his hopes for a "wife" and perhaps for a rise in the ranks of the rebel army.

Let us take a closer look at the story of his escape and his return to his family.

Return to civilian life. Sancho says that he escaped in February 2002 together with three younger rebels from the LRA camp in Bin Rwot in southern Sudan. By this time he had the lowly rank of a sergeant. They left the camp there with the excuse that they were going to collect honey, and turned themselves over to Sudanese troops. The four of them were heavily beaten and interrogated by the Sudanese soldiers and then put in prison. Here, too, Sancho repeatedly experienced situations in

which he was ill-treated and nearly died. With the aid of two Arabic-speaking Ugandan prisoners, the four men succeeded in telling their story to the top prison officer, including how they were being abused by the warders. They were released[27] and taken to *Save the Children* (a humanitarian NGO). They stayed there for three months before being flown to Uganda, where they were taken to a 'reception center' in northern Uganda (run by another aid organization). After two months his mother fetched him home. Sancho did not want to sit around with nothing to do, and started up a "*boda boda* (bicycle taxi) business" with an old bicycle of his parents. But the trips with the bicycle became too dangerous; on one occasion he only narrowly escaped from the LRA on his bicycle. Another time he and his brother spent a night in the "bush" and were shot at by the LRA, but they were able to get away. Sancho returned to work in the compound of his parents, and at night the family slept in the IDP camp. When his brother was captured in the compound by the LRA, again taken away and murdered immediately afterwards (probably because of his desertion from the LRA), Sancho feared that the same could happen to him. He left the compound of his parents and lived from then on in a town (inside the war zone).

Three years after his escape, Sancho got married and became the father of a child; only a short time after this he and his wife separated. He met another woman – Anna, as we call her – whom he married in 2007 and with her he had three children in the following years. The last child – a son – was born in 2013. This is the year in which he moved in with Maria. When Sancho caught Maria in bed with another man about a year later, he left her. He joined the Ugandan army, which accepted him despite his age (according to him, because of his experience as a rebel soldier). This gave him a certain degree of financial security (on a low level) and he was able to rent an apartment in Gulu for himself and his family. His job with the government army not only gave Sancho financial security and enabled him to pay for the schooling of his four children, as he says, but also gave him recognition. This helped him to come to terms with the discrimination he experienced in his home village. He says that, unlike his father, his neighbors did not love him and could not forgive him for his time in the bush, and that he repeatedly heard the remark "he has killed so many people". When at this point concrete acts of violence are mentioned which he was accused of having committed, he only says that for him this was "a common phenomenon", but it is not quite clear whether he means by this that the violence experienced, or committed, by him when he was with the rebels was part of the normality

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[27] As mentioned above, in March 2002 an agreement between Uganda and the Sudan (before the founding of South Sudan) was announced by both governments, which laid down that escaped or captured LRA fighters should be extradited to Uganda. Sancho does not explain why in this case he and the other LRA deserters were ill-treated by the prison warders, and it is difficult to speculate about this because of the quasi feudal structure of the state authorities and the generally chaotic security situation in southern Sudan at that time. One possibility among others is that the warders wanted to take revenge on escaped LRA fighters for atrocities committed by the LRA against members of a local ethnic grouping to which the warders felt that they belonged – perhaps in contrast to their superior.

of life as a rebel soldier, or whether he is referring to the "blame gossip" (see Elias and Scotson 2008) which he said was spread by his neighbors and, as is clear at other points of the interview, also by some of his near relatives.

There are thus considerable tensions and problems in this family, as Sancho often points out. Suspicions, rumors or accusations against Sancho are rife in the families of his father's siblings. Some think that he killed close relatives as an LRA soldier. He plays down the violence he witnessed – while denying having taken part in it – as being (explicitly) 'normal' in the context of the LRA war, and says that he saw things that were much worse during his time with the rebels. He also complains that his father gave to relatives valuable gifts (including cattle) which Sancho had given to him, and that his father had too willingly let others have land to which Sancho, or his father, had a right. This seems to annoy him very much and in this context he also criticizes his father's heavy drinking. However, he underlines that in the village his relatives still invite not only his father but also himself to important meetings of the community 'elders'. Perhaps this is an expression of Sancho's fear or suspicion that he could be excluded from these meetings when his father is no longer alive. He says explicitly that an advantage of being a member of the government army (the UPDF) is that here he is not confronted with evil gossip about his person. His first answer to the question why he joined the army is that in his and his father's village the people think and speak bad things about him:

> "That is what made him to join the UPDF because in the UPDF when they get information that you were once in the bush, they give you a higher priority. My advantage is my experience of the bush because they believe that for them who have been in the bush they have more experiences, that is my capital … **Since I joined the government's army, I do feel some changes**." (Interview 4)

He often repeats the view that his life has completely changed through the army, and says that no one in the army insults him because he allegedly killed so many people in the "bush"; now he is only a soldier like any other Ugandan soldier. In addition Sancho talks at length about how much better the training in the Ugandan government army is in contrast to the LRA, and he appears to identify himself with the Ugandan state. He says that he is learning about the national laws and especially that it is his job to protect civilians: "They train you how to protect the civilians and their property and Uganda as a whole." (Interview 4)

Maria's biographical course. It is very difficult to determine Maria's family background precisely. Just as in the case of Johann, it took several interviews and careful analysis to clarify her family relationships, partly because of the ambiguities or unresolved differences within the family in respect of Maria's (socio-)classificatory descent and clan membership. One reason for this is that she has no contact with her paternal clan, because her father died when she was very young and her mother returned with her as a small child to her own clan. Among the Acholi and similar

groupings it is normal in such a case to regard Maria as belonging to her mother's patriclan.

Today Maria lives alone with her four children in a rented apartment in Gulu. Maria's mother often helps her by taking the children, especially the younger ones, to stay with her in her village. Maria manages to make ends meet by earning money in different, creative ways, for example by baking and selling cookies. When money is short, especially when she has to pay school fees for her older children, she is helped out by Sancho or by a brother of her mother. The latter, a retired government soldier who lives in a distant town, said in the interview with him that he would be very interested in taking her into his household as a maid or governess. According to Maria, her mother's other 'brothers' are much less kind to her and unwilling to help her financially.

Maria's self-presentation is dominated by the image of an active, self-confident and autonomous woman, who has had a very difficult life since her early childhood. According to her presentation, she has managed her life with very little help from others. Our first meetings with her and our analysis of the interviews show that her self-confidence is to a large extent derived from being able to gain recognition by men, while she has tended to experience women as rivals. Thus in Maria's case, it was clearly better that she was interviewed by a man, Artur Bogner, and not by a woman.[28] In the meetings with Gabriele Rosenthal her manner was much more distant. Below we will examine more closely how she forms relationships with men, the roots of her 'agency', and above all her 'resilience'.

Childhood and adolescence. Maria was born around 1984 in Atanga, to the south of Kitgum, as the only surviving child of her mother. Her father was a soldier in the "Bush War" from 1981 to 1986, probably on the side of President Obote's government army and probably also (in 1985) that of his successor, Okello. According to Maria's mother, after returning he joined the rebel group led by Alice Auma "Lakwena". When Alice "Lakwena" fled to Kenya in 1987, Maria's father went with her, and died there not long afterwards. Maria's mother then returned with her daughter to a compound belonging to her family or clan of origin. She says she did this because nobody in her husband's clan was prepared to give her care and protection.

When Maria reports about her childhood, she speaks mainly of painful experiences. In particular she suffered from not being loved by her mother, who only began to like Maria when she returned from the "bush". As evidence of this, Maria

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[28] On the basis of our empirical experience, we think it is highly problematic to assume, as many of our colleagues do, that women who have been maltreated and traumatized by men should only be interviewed by women. This generalizing assumption overlooks the fact that each case has its own specific features and dynamic, and it completely ignores the fact that there are women who find it easier to talk to men about how other men have made them suffer. There are also men who are able to talk more openly about certain difficult, often 'intimate', topics to women than to men.

tells a story which she heard from her maternal grandmother. She was still a baby that couldn't yet crawl when her mother took her to a place some distance from the compound and simply put her down on the road and left her. The priest who had baptized Maria came by, took Maria to the mission and sent for her father. As a child her maternal grandmother was her main attachment figure, because her mother was often absent. Her grandmother also breastfed her and later taught her how to run a household.

Maria also talks about the death of her father and various illnesses. When she was about nine she fell seriously ill with 'Guinea-worm disease', as a result of which she could not walk properly for eight months. Only at the age of ten was she well enough to be able to go back to school. Her daily life and her bodily health had just become stabilized when Maria was abducted by LRA rebels during a bus journey in about 1995, when she was about eleven. She spent the next seven years in the "bush". As in Sancho's case, we suppose that Maria's serious illness when she was in primary school did more than just weaken her. We assume that through this experience, together with the support of certain attachment figures (in Maria's case perhaps her grandmother), these two children also developed a mental strength, or resilience, which helped them to survive in the "bush". The experience of overcoming deadly dangers can give a person self-confidence in later comparable situations or life phases. For Maria and for Sancho this is also bound up with a conviction of their own ability to act or 'agency'.

Abduction and time with the LRA. The bus in which Maria was sitting became caught up in a fight between LRA rebels and government soldiers. The LRA forced the government soldiers to retreat, beat up the bus driver and took the passengers captive. The captives were forced to go with them and to carry stolen goods. On the following day there was another battle between the LRA and government soldiers. Maria saw how a child soldier among the rebels died in the fight, whom she thought was not much older than herself. She describes how afraid she was of battles at the beginning of her time with the LRA:

> "That time whenever I heard that the soldiers are coming, my soul would leave me. I did not have a living soul in my body but a dead one. The other thing that happened to me was that whenever we were told that there was going to be an attack or if we are under attack already, I would fail to move, my energy would just disappear and I wouldn't be able to get up until I hear maybe a gunshot then I can start to run." (Interview 2)

As shown by this passage, Maria was afraid she might die, and she feared that she might have to stay with the LRA forever, as she explains here:

> "I had heard that if one eats the food of the LRA then he or she would not escape home, so I was trying all the time to avoid their food as much as I can." (Interview 2)

Some time later, her group set up camp near the Kilak Hills, to the north of Gulu, from where Maria was sent out together with other children to steal food in the area. If they came back empty-handed, they risked being heavily beaten. Maria witnessed various atrocities committed against civilians and other abductees. One situation she describes is how she was forced to watch while a man who had tried to run away from her LRA group had his lower lip and an ear cut off as punishment. Another situation which distresses her to this day was when she was ordered to participate in the murder of two girls who were accused of trying to escape. However, the commander then decided that Maria was still too small for this killing and it would be enough if she watched it. She was forced to look at the corpses.

These situations described by Maria are only examples of the countless others which she constantly experienced, as she says herself: "There were so many things that were similar. Just so many incidents in the bush. It is uncountable" (Interview 2). There was one incident which served to turn her fear of death into a genuine fear of extermination: a large group of girls, most of whom came from one particular region, were accused of witchcraft and, as Maria underlines, the girls were shot by direct order of Kony. Maria and other abductees were again forced to watch. Maria was shocked by the arbitrary killing:

> "I was very perplexed with what I saw, especially when they started killing. I was filled with extreme fear and I felt that anytime they could order for the killing of everyone else, or may decide to kill all the women or all the girls. Those were the thoughts that occupied my mind and as soon as I began to feel that way, my first thought was to escape and go back home. But to escape from Sudan to Uganda may not be easy because maybe the Lutugu people might kill you before reaching. Just like that I continued to stay with intense fear." (Interview 2)

Maria's descriptions of torture and murder, and being forced to kill fellow captives in bestial ways, correspond to the experiences (at least as eye-witnesses) of most long-term abductees of the LRA.[29] We will therefore concentrate on Maria's gender-specific experiences within the LRA and her very definite statements in this regard. The worst thing for Maria, and she says that this applies to all the other girls, was that at the young age of 12 or 13 they were given to very much older men as wives. These men "would just rape you mercilessly, he doesn't care and you a young girl sometimes walking becomes difficult" (Interview 1). She also says that the girls and women were responsible for cooking food and in the case of an attack they had to

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[29] See for example Blattman/Annan 2010: 136f., 140f.; Hollander/National Memory and Peace Documentation Centre (n.d.); Hollander 2010: 9f.

carry the hot cooking pots to a safe place, which often resulted in terrible burns. Boys had the problem that nobody cared for them. Girls at least got "some little bit of attention by commanders in terms of getting them access to food" (Interview 2). But boys went hungry because nobody gave them food, or they died from thirst because they were sent on raids without water. Many died from diarrheal diseases because nobody felt responsible for looking after them:

> "Nobody cared for the boys. They suffered and sometimes they had to steal things in order to survive. But also when they are caught stealing these things they would be beaten severely. These beatings when combined with the frailness due to lack of adequate food makes many boys susceptible to death." (Interview 2)

Maria describes how in one case a boy was killed by his comrades because the group had to drink their own urine for lack of water and this boy refused to share his.

When Maria was between 14 and 15, in 1998/1999, she was forced to marry a commander who was about 60 years old. The man raped her, and in doing so repeatedly caused her not only mental but also physical injuries. She was horrified when she realized after a few months that she was pregnant. She tried unsuccessfully to end the pregnancy by swallowing herbs and roots. In the seventh month of her pregnancy she contracted cholera and was taken by other women from her brigade to a hospital in Juba, in southern Sudan. At this time her husband was in Uganda, where he died in the following months.

In the hospital Maria was cared for by two Acholi nurses. After she had recovered, they offered to smuggle her to Khartoum, but Maria turned the offer down because she was too afraid of escaping or of the risks this entailed. Her baby was born a few weeks after she returned to the LRA camp. She describes the birth as very strenuous and difficult. Her baby was sickly and died at the age of 16 months. At the time of the death of her child (Maria does not say whether it was a boy or a girl and does not mention its name), Maria had already been forced to marry another LRA officer. Maria says that his first three wives resented this marriage and tried to blacken her name with their husband. One of the women told him that Maria had deliberately killed her child. The man then confronted her with this accusation and beat her nearly to death with an axe. In telling us about this extremely distressing experience, Maria's aim – as almost always in her self-presentation – seems to be to present her 'agency' and her ability to communicate or to build up a 'relationship' with men, and above all with influential or powerful men. She says that she reported this incident to higher ranking commanders, who discussed the matter and tried to clarify exactly what had happened. They discovered that it was the other wife who had accused her. Even Kony himself intervened personally, as Maria says with a hint of pride. Kony decided that both she and her second husband were innocent and that they should continue to live together as a couple.

Maria mentions Joseph Kony repeatedly in the course of her interviews and narrates about her meetings with him. In accordance with her image of a woman who is capable of asserting herself, especially in interactions with men, she describes situations in which she was able to impress Kony, for example by carrying a colleague from her brigade for a long distance after he had been injured in a battle. Or she tells about situations in which Kony intervened personally on her behalf. The choice of situations and the way in which Maria describes them suggest a certain respect or admiration for Kony. Like many of our other interviewees, Maria attributes supernatural powers to the LRA leader, and says this is why his commanders could not run away:

> "But you know Kony can even know the thoughts in your heart and that is what made the commanders to continue to stay." (Interview 2)

We observed this phenomenon constantly in the interviews. It does not stop Maria from expressing her disgust and regret over her fate with the LRA, and she talks at length about the manifold forms of violence and cruelty she experienced there

After a few months with her second husband, Maria again became pregnant. At this time she was about 15 or 16. In the second month of her pregnancy, her husband was arrested together with other LRA commanders, and they were accused of making plans to escape. Maria's behavior in this situation is remarkable. Although she describes her second husband as being extremely violent toward her, she was the only one of his wives to bring him food, despite the disapproval of the guards. She emphasizes this in the interview, but she does not explain why she did it. It is not clear whether she wanted to curry favor with him (and to gain an advantage over his other wives), or whether she felt attached to him despite the bad way he had treated her, or whether she simply felt sorry for him.

The LRA camp in Sudan, in which Maria and her brigade lived up to this point, was disbanded (around 2001/2002). Together with other women and children, Maria moved within Sudan to another camp at Nicitu, while her husband was taken to a camp in the Kit region. There he was released, and the charges against him and the other commanders were dropped. In Nicitu Maria's second baby was born, again under extremely difficult conditions. A few weeks after the birth, her husband and the other commanders arranged for the women and children to move to their camp in Kit. Maria lived there for just over a year. Because of the military campaign known as 'Iron Fist', in which Ugandan government troops could attack LRA camps in Sudan for the first time in a regular manner, Kony ordered the people in Maria's camp to return to Uganda. Maria, who was 17 or 18 years old, describes the journey as full of hardships. She had to carry weapons, baggage and her 18-month-old child. She was frequently unable to keep up with the group and arrived at the place where they were to spend the night so late in the evening that there was no food left. She did not have enough milk to breastfeed her son, and only because she had taken a little bread with her when she left Sudan did she and her son survive.

When they arrived in northern Uganda, Otti Vincent ordered that weak women should register themselves and their children as 'returnees' (in order to obtain amnesty under Uganda's Amnesty Law), and that they should be released for this purpose. The LRA troops were under heavy pressure and could not afford to keep the weak and the slow with them. Maria's husband did not want her to register. But Otti Vincent intervened, so that Maria left the LRA in June 2002, together with about 43 women and over 50 children, and an official letter from Otti Vincent. According to Maria, 60 women were registered, but some had been too afraid to leave and had stayed with the LRA. The group of women walked in the direction of Atiak, but soon met government soldiers who took them to their base. Not long after Maria had returned from the "bush", her husband died. An important aspect or part of this story is that Maria left the rebel army with the permission of her commander, or on his orders, so that she does not have to regard herself as a "deserter".

Return to civilian life. The women stayed with the government troops for a week before being taken to reception centers. Maria and her son were first taken to a reception center in Pader, and from there they were transferred to the reception center in Gulu which was considered to be safer. In Gulu, Maria waited in vain for a visit by members of her mother's family, who at that time lived in a village in the north of Acholiland. At some point, Maria took the initiative and threatened to go back to the LRA (!) if no one from the management team of the reception center would accompany her to the village to look for her family. Thus, she succeeded in finding her grandmother and went to live with her. Her mother also lived in this village but was mostly absent.

This was the beginning of a difficult time for Maria, full of loneliness, experiences of being discriminated against, and despair. Even her grandmother blamed her and her son because of their past with the rebels. She says:

> "That one day the grandmother came back home drunk. And when I came she told me, you the daughter of Satan why didn't you die from the bush?" (Interview 1)

Maria was so shocked that she could not answer; she lay on her bed and thought about committing suicide. It was concern for her son, who had no father and no right to land, that made her carry on each time:

> "That child has no father, has no land and my life is the child's life … and if I will not be there, the child will have nowhere to go." (Interview 4)

As a result of this situation, Maria decided to leave the village and go and live with friends in Gulu. Among other things, she began to bake cookies and sell them, so that she could pay for her son's schooling. She says that life in Gulu was hard without

a husband, and so she looked for a man to marry. She specifically looked for some-one who had been with the LRA, because any other man would probably have mal-treated her because of her past. She found a man who had been in the "bush" at least for a short time, and had three children with him.

In the beginning they had a good relationship, she says, but then her husband began raping and beating her, especially when he was drunk:

> "The man started overdrinking, unending and whenever he was drunk would come home and start abusing me." (Interview 1)

The members of her mother's family were also displeased because he showed no respect toward them; for example, he was always absent when they came on a visit. With the support of Sancho and of her maternal uncle, Maria left him in about 2013 and lived alone with her children in Gulu. However, her children often spent a lot of time in the village with their mother's family. According to Maria, the children's father gives them no financial support to this day. After leaving him, Maria ap-proached the family of her legal father and asked for land. But, as she says, her re-quest was refused.

Sancho told us that after leaving this man Maria had a love affair with Sancho for at least a year. Maria herself does not speak of her own accord about her rela-tionship with Sancho. Only when asked about it by the interviewer does she describe it as friendly. She says that he is a brother of her second husband in the "bush", in other words of the father of her eldest surviving child. After his return, Sancho had wanted to care for this son and had offered "to show him his rightful land". But Maria's uncle was against this idea. Maria implies in the interview that she knew Sancho in the "bush" and that he was her husband later. But no sooner has she said this than she takes it back again. Maria tries harder than Sancho to hide the role Sancho played, and still plays, in her life. It must be remembered that in the LRA a forbidden friendship or liaison nearly always meant putting your life at risk, especially in a case like this one. Perhaps her old fears, or the practice of keeping silent that was necessary at that time, still prevent Maria from speaking openly about her rela-tionship with Sancho.

Today, Maria repeatedly has financial problems and she is worried about her eldest son. The boy has difficulties at school, he is "not bright in class", which Maria thinks is due to his health problems as a small child and malnutrition when he was a baby in the "bush". As she explains, since his father is dead, he has no right to land. In the light of this fact, it seems surprising that the offer made by Sancho to take the eldest son to his clan and to show him his land was turned down by Maria's family or her maternal uncles. However, it is possible that they may change their minds at some time in the future. In the interview with Sancho, it is clear that he feels responsible for this "son". In the interviews and meetings with Sancho and Maria, it is also clear that they support each other in everyday life, both on an emo-tional level and in practical terms.

We can assume that Sancho and Maria have talked to each other, probably often, about their experiences with the LRA. For both of them, this opportunity to talk has very likely helped them to deal with their traumatizations. The conversations probably gave them a feeling that there is someone who understands, and enabled them *to translate their experiences into words*. Both of them describe the violence they witnessed in the LRA with a certain degree of detachment – this is particularly obvious in Sancho's case – and usually in great detail, and when asked they are willing to add more details. Unlike other former child soldiers we interviewed, they both succeed in creating a good balance between brevity and detailed description in their narrations. This is a clear indication that they are not talking for the first time about the atrocities they experienced and everything they suffered from while with the LRA. However, an important difference between the two is that Sancho speaks much more unemotionally about these things than Maria. We assume that during the years he spent with the LRA he developed a defense mechanism, more so than Maria, in the sense of ignoring his feelings, so that he could continue to function while feeling nothing. This apparent coldness, which was also noticeable in the meetings with Artur Bogner, unsettled the interviewer to a certain extent, especially because Sancho described the details of killings and other horrific events so unemotionally and in a way rationally. By contrast Maria impressed the interviewer with her warmth or undisguised emotion. She expressed her pain and her anger over these events clearly, both verbally and nonverbally.

4.4   A contrastive comparison of the cases in their familial and societal contexts

If we consider the three familial and life histories presented above, the question arises whether, in view of their complexity, it is possible to draw conclusions on the basis of our case reconstructions concerning which components tend to have an advantageous effect, and which tend to have a negative effect on the so-called reintegration processes of former child soldiers and rebel fighters into civilian life. It could be argued that the differences in the familial and biographical courses of Johann, Sancho and Maria are much too big to be able to draw general conclusions going beyond the single case. Such doubts in respect of the generalization of our findings can be countered with the argument that extremely contrasting cases are often helpful in revealing commonalities (as well as essential differences). Moreover, each of the cases we have presented stands for a course which illustrates the *interaction* of certain components which, in the sense of the Gestalt theory, can be functionally significant for the process of (re)integration.[30] In other words, each single

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[30] In the sense of Gestalt theory, a part or a component of a Gestalt "is defined and qualified by its functional significance which, in turn, is determined by its essential and necessary references to functional significances of other parts" (Gurwitsch 2010/1964: 135).

case stands for a type (to borrow the terminology of Lewin 1992/1927), and this means that in other cases with a similar interaction of certain components a similar reintegration course can be expected.

Johann is representative of the course of a former child soldier who suffered extreme traumatization because he was forced to murder his parents (a fact associated with a very hostile and painful relationship with his commander), and who was strongly stigmatized in his social milieu after 'returning' because of what he had done. In his case, the family constellation further prolonged and increased his traumatization after his return from the "bush". This trajectory of sequential traumatization and lack of support by his family has prevented him from earning a stable income and starting a family of his own, which would make it easier for him to change from the role of a child to that of an adult, husband and father, and to become economically and emotionally more independent from his family of origin and its (partly) detrimental impact on his personal development.

By contrast, Sancho represents a former child soldier who experienced much better conditions than Johann during his time in the LRA because he received fatherly care from his commander, and whose reintegration process is strongly characterized by interaction of the following components: a fair degree of support from his paternal family of origin, starting a family of his own, having the support of his friend and (for a time) partner, Maria, and finally, joining the government army and thus feeling, at least to some extent, that he now belongs to Uganda as a nation. All these are important components of a stabilizing course after returning from a rebel army. In Uganda, as in many young states of the Global South, membership in the army may have an important 'integrative' function for the social organization of the so-called "nation". In this respect the army can sometimes be compared to other sectors of society that require a prolonged professional or academic training. As a member of it, Sancho will be encouraged to learn English, the national official language, and to complete his school education; in Acholi society it is considered normal for a man, unlike a woman, to have at least some basic level of school education. Therefore the lack of it is perceived as a greater disadvantage for a male than for a female. Joining the army gives former child soldiers or young rebel fighters not only an opportunity to make up for their lack of formal education due to their years in the "bush", but also a feeling of belonging, a space in which they are (relatively) protected from discrimination, and the feeling that they are full members of 'Ugandan society'. Other former rebel fighters often do not have any chance to attain this feeling or the social positioning corresponding to it.

Maria represents a former child soldier who during her time in the "bush" succeeded in developing a feeling of individual power or agency in her relationship with male commanders (including Kony), and in taking on the protective and caring role of a mother and 'wife'. How emotionally supportive closeness to another person can be, both before and after 'returning', was also shown in other interviews with ex-rebel soldiers, as in the case of Sancho and his benign relationship with his commander. This may also be true in cases where closeness is the result of abduction,

enslavement or forced marriage. Further important components of Maria's favorable course of reintegration are the considerable support she gets from some members of her mother's family, and her long friendship with Sancho. Neither Maria nor Sancho have the problem that Johann is faced with: having to live with a past in which he *murdered his closest relatives*. Moreover, they were older than Johann when they returned, and of an age at which they are expected to found a family. After their return, both Sancho and Maria founded families, so that in contrast to Johann they were no longer children themselves, but parents who were responsible for their own children. This was connected to a degree of independence from their families of origin.

Despite the many differences, the three biographies presented here, like the other interviews we conducted with ex-rebels, also have certain common features. It must be acknowledged that the survival and the 'return' of these three child soldiers are certainly due to more than just luck or chance, in view of the many LRA rebels who were killed, who died of disease or exhaustion, or who simply disappeared, often in distant places or in neighboring countries. In addition to considerable energy, a strong will to survive, and the ability to develop defense mechanisms, their survival was also due to protection by high-ranking commanders, promotion within the hierarchy of the rebel organization, or perhaps even forced marriage with a high-ranking commander.

The interviews we conducted also showed that there were extremely difficult dynamics in almost all the families of origin of the former fighters. These included great problems in connection with alcohol and domestic violence, disagreements over real or supposed kin relationships and consequent rights to land or participation rights, and manifest or latent demands for compensation by the victims of violence. The extremely ambivalent relationship with the returnees or the discrimination experienced by the returnees was clear both in the individual interviews and in the group discussions and ethnographic interviews which we conducted. Paradoxically these experiences of discrimination often go together with a more or less manifest admiration for Joseph Kony. This is expressed for example when Johann's uncle says that Johann is responsible for the murder of his own parents, and explicitly absolves Kony. In this the non-abducted civilians agree with the former child soldiers. The returned ex-rebels ascribe supernatural powers, and in some case their survival, to the LRA leader. Likewise, an ambivalent attitude to the Ugandan government runs through the interviews with members of all groupings.

It seems to us that the ambivalence (or in other words the intra- and *interpersonal* split) in the attitude of the Acholi civilian population to the returnees, which we observed in almost all the interviews we conducted, cannot be resolved without resolving the ambivalent attitude to Kony. But this latter ambivalence cannot be resolved without clarifying the *collective* attitude of the Acholi to the (then) rebellion and seizure of power by Museveni's rebel movement, and to the rebellion of the LRA and its special methods (recruitment by abduction, mainly of children, and intimidation of the Acholi civilian population by means of repeated and systematic

atrocities). But something else is also necessary, namely an open, collective assessment or reflection by the non-abducted adult civilians and their (opinion) leaders of their *own* role in connection with protecting the abducted children, including the girls. In view of their own painful past, it is probably too difficult at present for the majority of the Acholi to clearly admit their own ambivalence toward the LRA, their own helplessness during the abduction of children and adolescents, and their feelings of distance, ambivalence and horror in respect of the returnees, or to reflect on their own admiration for the rebel leader Kony and various uncomfortable questions connected with it. It will probably take at least one more sociohistorical generation before this becomes possible. This is all the more likely because the long-term social or socio-political process of escalation – and sometimes de-escalation – of what has become a permanent conflict between different central governments of Uganda and "the" Acholi, or a majority of them, has continued for an extremely long time, not only in the decades of the government of Museveni, but also during the dictatorship of Idi Amin, and during Obote's two periods of government. In other words, both historically and "structurally", there is more than just one "reason" for this long process of genesis and escalation of a conflict – just as for the resulting situation, which we have described here, in respect of relations between ex-rebels and civilians in Acholiland.

Not least, the trend repeatedly seen in Uganda's history toward an autocracy supported by the army, or a purely military government, or support for such a political and socio-cultural development, has become stronger again in the last ten years or so, at least in important parts of state and society, including the civilian population (for an impressive account, see for instance Kagoro 2015). One should not go as far as Richard Reid, who, in his recent overview of the history of "modern" Uganda, places the violent character of Museveni's regime on the same level as Amin`s tyranny[31] (Reid 2017: 88ff.). This is too unreflecting, even, or especially, in respect of Acholiland, if we consider the not unimportant period since 2006, i.e. since the LRA was driven out of northern Uganda. The renewed trend toward a tougher "democratic dictatorship" – with similarities for example to Erdogan's Turkey – doubtless represents a great obstacle to any mitigation of the tensions and bitterness in the relationship of the Acholi with the central government and with those parts of the population of Uganda that are sociopolitically "represented" by it, whether directly or indirectly. However, this is not the only important obstacle on the way to "national" reconciliation, or – as we have tried to show – even reconciliation within the we-group of the Acholi.

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[31] In this, he obviously blames the government for the violent acts committed by the LRA – in agreement with the worldview of the rebels, and of many members of the Acholi civilian population.

5 Rebels in West Nile and in Acholiland after their return to civilian life: between a strong we-image and experiences of isolation and discrimination[1]

Artur Bogner & Gabriele Rosenthal

5.1   Divergent conditions of "return" in West Nile and Acholiland

The former rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Acholiland generally find themselves in a difficult situation, both with regard to their position in their family, their clan, and the sub-region, and in respect of their poor social networks. In this chapter, we will compare their situation with that of ex-rebels in West Nile[2]. The ex-rebels in these two regions have in common that they lived with one of the rebel organizations in the "bush" in northern Uganda for years or even for decades, they fought against government soldiers, and they took part in horrifying attacks on civilians in their home regions. However, they differ in several ways: most of the rebels in West Nile had joined the rebellion against the government voluntarily, most of

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[1] This chapter is an abridged version of Bogner/Rosenthal (2017).

[2] This chapter is based on the results of biographical and ethnographical interviews with ex-rebels, members of the civilian population and experts in the two regions. The collection of data on the local peace process in West Nile was completed in 2012 and was based on fifty-nine biographical narrative interviews and 71 ethnographic interviews, plus nineteen group discussions (see also Bogner/Rosentahl 2014; Bogner/Neubert 2016, 2013b, 2012). For details of data collection in Acholiland, see ch. 3.2 of this volume.

them were older than those abducted by the LRA, and, most important, their attacks on their own people were less brutal, or less frequently so. Nevertheless, both in West Nile and in Acholiland, their victims were often their neighbors, relatives, or inhabitants of neighboring villages. During the civil war in northern Uganda, which repeatedly escalated between 1979 and 2006, the rebel fighters from West Nile and from Acholiland were in constant danger of death; they had to fear enemy soldiers, suffered extreme hardship, and were often (more or less) forced to take part in the worst forms of murder, assault, torture, child abuse, enslavement, mutilation, rape, robbery and collective intimidation. They became perpetrators of atrocities, and were traumatized themselves (in many cases more than once), especially in the case of those who were abducted as children or young adolescents by the rebels of the LRA.

Here, our focus is on the question whether, and how, a successful "return" to civilian life is possible, what the problems are, and what kind of life the former rebel fighters now lead – in some, but not all, cases in their original local communities and families.

If one compares West Nile and Acholiland and the rebel groups based there, it is not hard to find, on the collective or "macro-structural" level of observation, considerable differences in the biographies of rebel fighters before their return to civilian life. This means that the "return" of the fighters, and what happens subsequently, is shaped by very different conditions. In West Nile these conditions can be roughly summarized as follows: the person concerned usually joined the rebel organization as a young or middle-aged *adult* and on a voluntary basis, at least formally[3]; demobilization was the result of a group decision to capitulate (agreed to by at least some part of the rebel organization), or a peace agreement with the government; the rebel organization had a much less "total" or totalitarian organizational structure than the LRA, and carried out much fewer violent attacks on civilians, and fewer deliberately cruel attacks designed to intimidate the civilian population. In Acholiland, by contrast, the former child soldiers of the LRA typically look back on a history made up of the following components: violent abduction in their middle childhood or early adolescence (under the age of 15), a brutal separation from their families (in the context of raids, mostly involving bodily violence against family members, neighbors and other children from their surroundings), and extremely traumatizing living conditions with the LRA, which is a mixture of guerilla army and millenarian, "apocalyptic" sect with a charismatic leader who claims supernormal qualities. Unlike the

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[3] The term "voluntary" is used here in a legal rather than a psychological sense, especially in distinction to the often extremely cruel abductions carried out by the LRA. In West Nile this applies particularly to the second wave of the rebellion (1994 to 2002), and much less to the first wave between 1979 and 1986. In the first phase, the men in West Nile were under heavy social and situative pressure to join the local rebel groups, especially if they had previously been ordinary soldiers (not least in order to protect the local civilian population from attacks by various other armed groups, including Ugandan, Zairean and Sudanese soldiers).

rebel groups in West Nile, members of the LRA were frequently ordered to kill fellow prisoners of their own age, friends or close relatives (during raids on their compounds or villages) and they were almost invariably forced to witness such acts (e.g. Blattman/Annan 2010: esp. 133–139, 141). The ritualized killings often involved torture, followed by desecration or mutilation of the corpse. They were apparently intended to intimidate the tens of thousands of child soldiers in the LRA, to deter them from trying to escape, and to destroy their ties with their families and home communities.

Unlike with the rebels in West Nile, in the case of the LRA returnees demobilization or escape was generally an individual act and frequently took place in the context of a serious injury, a hopeless battle, a flight from, or capture by, government soldiers or their allies. Escape was often the only alternative to execution (whether because of unfitness for transport or internal conflicts and tensions). Return, flight or desertion often happened spontaneously following an unplanned separation from fellow fighters, the commander, or the person the individual had been forced to marry, all people with whom a close relationship may have developed in the course of time. Such an escape was hardly ever planned a long time beforehand, or together with comrades – if one can speak of "comrades" in this context.[4] Returning from the "bush" was usually not the consequence of a peace agreement or capitulation, which we see as a significant difference from West Nile. To anticipate one of our findings: the returnees from the LRA were met by a civilian population that had become estranged from the rebel fighters, much more so than in West Nile. Another difference is that here (unlike in West Nile after 1990) the civilian population had been uprooted through flight or (forced) resettlement, was often broken up and to a large extent away from their original locations, and (at times in their majority) concentrated in so-called "protected" camps. Another big difference is that many of the (generally male) rebel soldiers in West Nile were betrothed or married before they went into the "bush", and most of them maintained contact with their partners and families while they were away (see also Mischnick/Bauer 2009; Refugee Law Project 2004). In or after the second phase of the rebellion in West Nile (1994–2002), the surviving rebels thus returned not only to operative family networks, but also to broadly intact ownership rights, which were generally associated with their positions in their families of origin. By contrast, the forcibly recruited soldiers of the LRA refrained from making contact with their families – when they came close to them during raids – in order to avoid putting them at risk (e.g. Hollander 2010: 34). Since

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[4] In our interviews with former child soldiers of the LRA, we were repeatedly told how dangerous it was to strike up friendships with other people in the "bush" (see for instance Hollander 2010: 39), because one ran the risk of having one's own forbidden intentions or wishes betrayed by them, or of betraying their secrets and then having to kill them as their friend (and in order to exonerate oneself), or of being killed by them for the same reasons (on the structure and worldview of the LRA, see esp. Mergelsberg 2010; Titeca 2010).

most of them were recruited as minors, and the phases of armed conflict in Acholiland lasted much longer than in West Nile (with the exception of the present-day district of Yumbe and parts of the adjacent districts), most of them returned to greatly modified family constellations, and their claims to land ownership are repeatedly rejected with a variety of arguments (see below).

Before this backdrop it is not surprising that the interviews we conducted in both areas, and our observations, show that the ex-rebels in West Nile[5] are in a better situation in relation to the civilian population than the former child soldiers who have returned from the "bush" in Acholiland. It is also not hard to see differences in the dominant discourses on ex-rebels in the two areas in respect of their past. In West Nile, our interviews show clearly that the dominant discourse on collective belonging, among both civilians and ex-rebels, has the whole population of the province as its (collective) subject and claims that "we in West Nile are the real victims of Uganda's history", where the term "we" can easily be replaced by "our ex-rebels", who are regularly referred to by the local elders[6] in West Nile as "our boys". In the case of the former fighters of the LRA in Acholiland, the corresponding we-image is much less uniform. The Acholi are largely united in a negative or hostile attitude towards Museveni's government, and their hidden or open admiration of, or at least strong feelings of empathy for, the LRA leader, Joseph Kony, and, amongst other things in this connection, their approval of an amnesty for the rebel leaders (Finnström 2008; Pham et al. 2007: 34–38). But, as we will show, the attitude towards the former child soldiers (who nearly always constituted the majority[7] of the active LRA fighters) differs substantially from this, and is much less accepting and forgiving.[8]

If one wants to understand and explain the nuances of the collective discourses and differences in people's everyday experiences on the level of their experiential history, i.e. the sedimentation of interpretations and experiences that are built up in the course of a lifetime, besides considering differences on the level of 'macro-structural factors', it is necessary to adopt the perspectives of the actors and to reconstruct the stories of their experiences as abducted children and fighters and later as returnees to civilian life. The way they experience civilian life today depends on what they experienced in the "bush" with the rebel organization, in what ways they have been

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[5] Here, in contrast to the LRA, practically only males and normally adults were recruited as fighters, while women and girls were abducted for use as sex slaves.

[6] "Elders" refers here to the (opinion) leaders of a village, settlement or kin grouping, and not necessarily the eldest in terms of age.

[7] This means that there was a very high fluctuation, whether due to death, flight or capture. See Allen/Vlassenroot 2010a; Blattman/Annan 2010: 139, 138.

[8] The survey conducted by Pham et al. (2007) among the local population shows little difference between attitudes to the LRA leaders and to returned child soldiers. In our opinion, however, this finding reveals merely the surface of the dominant discourse (ibid. 34ff.).

'damaged', how they were received by their families, and what kind of life they are now living. Their present situation is constitutive of their attitude to the past (see Rosenthal 1995), depending on whether, and how, they have been reintegrated in family, household and village networks, and which powerful collective discourses or they-images and self-images of themselves and their past they have to struggle with.

On the level of experiential history, this chapter addresses the following questions: How do rebels who have returned from the "bush" talk about their lives, how do they describe their past and their present, and which discourses have become established in the groupings to which they feel they belong and to whose (collective) knowledge they refer? We concentrate on a "maximal contrastive comparison" of biographical interviews with returned rebels in the two areas, and also consider them in the light of our many interviews with civilians in northern Uganda. We will present our most important findings, illustrated by selected interviews, and especially the great differences the interviews reveal in respect of forming a shared we-image, collective memory and we-feeling, and in respect of more or less organized groupings. It is clear that the ex-rebels in West Nile have formed such a collective self-image or self-description, but this cannot be said of the former child soldiers or "formerly abducted persons" of the Lord's Resistance Army in Acholiland. Rather, they frequently use a form of stigma management that involves concealing (see Goffman 1963) their past in the "bush", because they feel discriminated against by members of the civilian population, and often also by their own families, and degraded on the 'human level'. This is a clear and very important difference between them and the former rebels in West Nile. As in many other socio-cultural settings in the Global South, they are frequently regarded as having been contaminated by harmful spirits ("*cen*").[9] In principle this applies to rebel fighters in both regions but it is obvious that this problem and the issues connected to it are of greater relevance to the current situation of the ex-rebels in Acholiland. Amongst others, their collective images and their right to "participation" and land at the local or village level are far more often contested or impaired within their milieus of origin, their local communities, kin groups, families or households. Moreover, for years they and their families had been threatened by the rebels with acts of revenge as punishment for running away, which in some cases were actually carried out before their eyes (see Baines 2009, 2008). The LRA was capable of carrying out military actions in Uganda up to 2006; but for several years after this, the population still had to reckon with the possibility of a renewed invasion of their region by the rebel group and of such acts of revenge (see Lenhart 2014; Allen et al. 2010: 280). In many cases the families of returnees denied them their due position and property, with arguments such as "they have a

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[9] See for example Akello et al. 2006; Honwana 2006: ch. 5; Finnström 2005. This applies not only to rural Africa, but to all socio-cultural contexts in which the "de-magification of the world", to borrow Weber's expression, meaning primarily the disempowerment of spirits or lower gods, has not (yet) become a dominant principle of the prevailing public worldview.

rebel mentality" or "they haven't been properly brought up, they were socialized in the bush".

5.2   West Nile: "We are the real victims of Uganda's history"

A biographical narrative interview[10] with a former rebel soldier in West Nile shows clearly how the rebel fighters suffer from the past.[11] Karim (born about 1975) speaks about this in very graphic terms, and uses the same arguments that are found in almost all interviews with West Nile's ex-rebels. He joined the rebels at a relatively young age and is thus nearer in age to the former child soldiers in Acholiland than most of our other interviewees in West Nile. For these reasons, we will focus here on his case. Karim compares his suffering to cancer, a chronic or life-threatening disease:

> "We don't want like our widows ((of)) our former fighters to die with that pain that I am am I have I've been suffering in whole of my life because I've been a fighter ((...)) it's a bit remaining in the hearts of the reporters ((i.e. former rebels who have applied for amnesty, A.B./G.R.)) as a cancer something that can't be something that can't forgotten, be forgotten ((...)) I'm suffering because I'd been a rebel fighter."[12]

This statement is embedded in an account of the way the members of the rebel groups based in West Nile got together and organized themselves in various different associations after their armed struggles had come to an end, in order to improve their situation. Before showing how the veterans interpret their situation, and how they think it must be changed, we will first take a look at Karim's own story, in order to understand the pain he speaks of here. We assume that Karim was between 18 and 19 years old in 1994 (according to Karim: 1995) when he joined the rebels, meaning in this case the West Nile Bank Front (WNBF). He justifies his decision by saying that, as the eldest son of his father, he decided to lead his own life instead of looking on while his parents suffered. Moreover, his parents were no longer able to continue paying for his schooling. From what he says about this time, however, it is also clear that he decided to join the rebels because he was not doing well at school. The rebels gave him a sense of achievement and – as he does not fail to mention –

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[10] On the basic methodology of narrative interviews, see Rosenthal 2018: ch. 5.4; Schuetze 1976, 1977. On the analysis of biographical interviews, see Rosenthal 2018: ch. 6.2.

[11] The names of the interviewees, place names and other biographical details have been altered for reasons of data protection and this was explained to the persons involved at the beginning of each interview.

[12] This interview was conducted in English by Artur Bogner in 2010. The quotations are from a verbatim transcript, for an explanation of the transcription symbols see appendix.

he obtained the rank of a junior officer[13]. In 1997, when the WNBF gave up its struggle after heavy military defeat (see Prunier 2004), rather than joining another rebel army, such as the UNRF II, Karim signed up with the government army, where he stayed until about 2002. He says he did this because he hoped that the government would help him to complete his schooling. But this hope was not fulfilled.

At the time of the interview conducted by Artur Bogner in 2010, it was eight years since Karim had returned to civilian life. Nevertheless, his dominant feeling at this time was of suffering from the past as if it was an incurable disease, and, as he emphasized in the interview, he did not want to "die" with this pain. Like many of the ex-rebels we interviewed, he connects his suffering with the fact that former rebels in West Nile get little appreciation for their struggle, and the fact that West Nilers are discriminated against in Uganda. Reading between the lines, it is also clear that the shame of military defeat plays a role in his suffering. In the sequence quoted above, this is indicated indirectly by the reference to "reporters", by which Karim means himself and all the other rebels who laid down their arms and accepted one of the formal or informal amnesties offered by the government. Like many other WNBF fighters, Karim took up this offer after the defeat of his rebel group. He subsequently participated as a member of the government army in the fight against the Lord's Resistance Army that originated from the neighboring region.

The trajectory of Karim's life is typical of the West Nile rebels who suffered a collective defeat in the struggle against Museveni's government, a government on which they are dependent for help since returning to civilian life, and in whose army several of them later fought. The most important opponent was the LRA, which the government army sought to overcome with the aid of former guerilla fighters, on the principle of "fight fire with fire". It seems rather obvious that in this case ex-rebels from West Nile joined hands with their former opponent to fight an old, and now common, enemy (the rebels from Acholiland who had helped to overthrow Idi Amin, who was popular in West Nile). This is a past which former West Nile rebels do not like to remember, or at least certain phases of it, because it induces a sense of shame. They feel ashamed of their rebellion's military defeat, and this shame is aggravated by the fact that the West Nile ex-rebels get the impression that the fight they fought on behalf of the local people is too little appreciated, even in their home region. In this situation it is somewhat difficult to speak with pride about one's time as a rebel. By contrast, Karim has no trouble showing how proud he is of his time as a government soldier fighting against the LRA rebels from Acholiland, and it is in this context that he talks about the competences he acquired with the WNBF. He boasts about how, as a former guerilla fighter, he was able to use his military experience to assess the tactics of the LRA.

Just like the other ex-rebels we interviewed, Karim presents his experiences as a rebel as a story of victimhood. As a leading member of a veteran association and

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[13] Warrant Officer One.

former WNBF commander put it during his self-presentation in a biographical interview, the rebels of West Nile are the "real victims of Uganda's history". Following this logic, directly after the passage quoted above, Karim explains his pain as a pain which West Nilers have to bear collectively, and essentializes this for them:

> "Generally there is also another pain (2) with us but you have just to endure it and (believe) it that (2) it's it's it's our nature (2) it's our nature as the northerners or the West Nile people that (3) in this generation we are in we must suffer (1) we must suffer (1) ah: the way (you) are living but (1) (it) the future generation to come and enjoy that's our belief now we have but we don't know how really we are going to forget that."

Here we see the dilemma of this argument: how can one try to ensure that future generations of West Nilers can enjoy their life, if one cannot, and probably should not, forget this suffering? And above all: how can one enjoy one's life when one belongs to such a neglected and disadvantaged province of Uganda?

> "You from West Nile, from the north you would just believe eh we're just in a dead country we're just forgotten people one we don't have roads good roads we don't have power system (1) we don't have eh: hospitals we don't have schools better schools (1) when I'm in Kampala I feel as if sometimes I'm not in Uganda (1)."

Here, as throughout the interview, Karim explicitly gets to the heart of the arguments of the dominant discourse in his grouping, and, in comparison with other interviews, reflectedly, or in a manner that shows he is used to reproducing the collective discourse that is dominant in his region. As in the other interviews with West Nile ex-rebels, it does not always seem to be clear in this discourse who belongs to the we-group and who doesn't, and how "we" is to be defined. Thus, Karim sometimes refers to "West Nilers" and sometimes more generally to "northerners". The latter include the Acholi, the neighbors who are not very much liked, at least by the ex-rebels in West Nile, because they supported the former dictator Obote (the rival of Amin).[14] In our opinion, an important function of such collective we-concepts, or constructions of belonging, whether they relate to West Nile, or only some section of its inhabitants, or to northern Uganda as a whole, is that they enable ex-rebels such as Karim to regard their suffering not as an individual but as a collective fate. They feel they are part of a community of people who all suffer from the past (and

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[14] For most inhabitants of West Nile, the end of Amin's dictatorship constituted a traumatic break in their biographies and their collective history. In the following years many, or most, of them fled or were expelled, and they suffered from long phases of civil war, massive war crimes, extreme poverty, extreme hunger and devastating epidemics.

a past specific to them). This consistent empirical finding in West Nile differs clearly from the findings in our interviews with former child soldiers in Acholiland.

In Karim's case, it remains to comment on the reference to widows in the first sequence quoted above. The significance of this reference can be explained by the context in which the interviewer met Karim while looking in West Nile for "civil society" associations (organizations with voluntary membership) set up by victims of violence perpetrated during the civil war. In the district of Koboko he came across the West Nile Disadvantaged Widows and Orphans Association (WENDWOA), a comparatively active and relatively influential association with thousands of members.[15] As he soon discovered, this organization had been founded by a leading female officer of the WNBF, who was one of the very few women to have assumed a military function in this group. We will call her Matilda. In our interview with her, she explained that her goal had been to create a form of self-organization and interest group not only for the families of ex-rebels, but also for the former rebel fighters themselves. Thus, the association did more than organizing and providing support for widows and orphans. Among the members were far fewer people who had been robbed or seriously injured by the rebels than the interviewer first assumed. The discourse in this organization, and the we- and self-presentations of the chairperson, Matilda, and of Karim, were clearly concerned with raising funds.[16] Karim's ambition to improve the situation of the disadvantaged West Nilers through his activity in this organization was explicitly connected with this goal. This also explains how the organization got its name, as Matilda admitted in a later narrative interview with both authors.

During our first meeting with her, Matilda suggested that we should interview Karim, emphasizing that he was a (former) child soldier. Karim, on the other hand, did not present himself in the interview as a child soldier, but as someone who decided himself as a young adult that he wanted to join the rebels, even if his hopes were unrealistic and he was taken in by false promises (which happened again when he chose to become a government soldier). We may ask why Karim was suggested for an interview, and why Matilda emphasized that he had been a child soldier. We assume that suggesting that even children had to go and fight is a way of reinforcing the firmly established discourse of collective victimhood in West Nile, and the chairperson of the association is probably very aware that this label, just like the mention of widows and orphans, is more likely to move potential donors to give.

However, the emphasis on victimhood, or talking about orphans, widows, and even child soldiers, contradicts the picture presented by Karim of self-determined

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[15] According to the chairperson, there were 3804 members in 2011, and 2794 members at the beginning of 2010.

[16] Despite the difficult conditions in West Nile, the organization has been fairly successful in this field. Compared with other veteran associations and similar groups, the WENDWOA, which at least nominally is a women's organization, appeared to concentrate on mutual aid as one of the main aims of the association much more than its "male" counterparts.

action and the high esteem in which military service is held in West Nile. Karim explains his decision to join the WNBF with the words: "I had to decide myself what to do". In the interview with him, it is clear that the idea of serving as a soldier is charged with significance because of his family's history. He admires the military past of his "grandfathers" and his father, and refers to this family history when talking about military principles. His "grandfathers" fought in the British army in the First World War. In about 1971 or 1972, shortly after Amin's military coup, his father became a soldier in the Ugandan army. After Amin's overthrow in 1979, Karim's parents were forced to flee with him and his siblings across the nearby border into the north-east of what was then Zaire. His father joined one of the rebel groups which at that time were made up of supporters of Amin or former officials of his regime, and to a large extent people from West Nile.

This military background is typical of many families in West Nile and helps to explain why the capitulation, or the peace agreement it led to, is so injuring to the pride or self-esteem of the ex-rebels. The strong we-feeling observable in West Nile can also be seen as a kind of self-empowerment, a way of strengthening the collective and individual self-assurance of its inhabitants, who can say, 'We West Nilers stand together as a (strong) collective against the rest of Uganda'. It seems that "we" here is a reference not only to the rebels, but to all the inhabitants of West Nile. This makes the rebels a natural and important part of a big collective of victims, a part that is especially hard hit by the common suffering and disadvantages.[17] They belong to the we-group of West Nilers in general and to the we-group of "ex-combatants", which includes not only the ex-rebels but all ex-soldiers in the region. The fact that their associations are called "ex-combatants associations" suggests that the name could be understood as the expression of a kind of socio-political coalition – or at least as an offer of coalition.[18] In this "we", the ex-rebels include the civilians whom they robbed, injured and mutilated during raids, and whose daughters and wives they raped or abducted. In a way, the most recent peace agreement supports this construction of a more or less conflict-free we-concept. At least this agreement helped the rebels of the last active rebel group in West Nile, UNRF II, to achieve something positive for all the inhabitants of West Nile, namely a promise by the government to promote the "development" of this region in special ways after many years of a development blockade. This definition of the situation negotiated in the peace agreement between the leaders of UNRF II and the government allows the rebels to present themselves in the public discourse as preservers and defenders of the interests of the local population, and especially of their need for "development" and reconstruction. Even if this definition of the situation is no longer generally accepted, it is

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[17] Rice 2009: 256; for an instance of an academic version of this we-image, see Leopold 2005: 70–73 and passim.

[18] The government has created and sealed a corresponding commonality of interests, for instance by paying pensions to the former servicemen and functionaries of Amin's regime, including the ex-rebels of the UNRF II; see Namutebi/Karugaba 2011.

not openly questioned or criticized – obviously in order to avoid endangering the peace that has reigned in West Nile since the latest peace agreement for the region was concluded by this rebel group in 2002.[19]

However, this we-image of collective victimhood is to some extent contradicted by the fact that, unlike the civilian population, the rebels in West Nile are well networked as a we-group and were the major 'winners' of the peace agreement, which gave them material benefits, and for some of them, especially the rebel leaders, an assurance that they could join the government army. In addition, the veteran associations set up in West Nile by the former rebels after the peace agreement in 2002 became the main beneficiaries of subsidies for non-governmental, "civil-society" organizations in this region, the distribution of which is controlled or influenced by the government. In this way, the government hopes to create a lasting peace with the former rebels here, and to gain their support for the ruling party. Moreover, the rebel veterans benefit from many longstanding personal connections in the government, local administrations and army. A closer look at the figuration between ex-rebels and civilians shows that especially the people who were robbed, abducted, raped or mutilated by them have frequently become outsiders in this region (Bogner/Rosenthal 2014; Peters 2008). In a group interview with victims of collective violence, one participant said that fear of the ex-rebels and their influence on the government and in the administration of the province was what prevented the victims of collective violence from talking openly, in local public spaces, about their problems.

As we will show below, compared to the former child soldiers in Acholiland, the West Nile ex-rebels enjoy a virtually privileged position in their relationship with the rest of the local population.

5.3   Acholiland: Respected in the discourse, discriminated in practice?

In January 2015, together with our field assistant and interpreter, Geoffrey Okello[20], Gabriele Rosenthal arranged a group interview (to be conducted in Luo) with three former child soldiers in Acholiland: Lydia (born about 1990), Tom (born about 1982) and Johann (born about 1990). We had conducted several individual interviews with each of these three people before this meeting took place. Their family and life histories are presented in detail in chapter 3 of this volume. As already observed in the individual interviews, this group interview clearly revealed the isolation of these three former child soldiers, their lack of common communication spaces, and their experience of different kinds of discrimination. As this group interview is

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[19] See Bauer 2013: 179–180, 177; Bauer 2009: 39–40; Peters 2008: 44–47, 53ff., 22; Brix 2009: 37ff.; Weber 2009: 66f.; Mischnick/Bauer 2009: 80f., 85.

[20] We would like to thank him here for his devoted and competent assistance.

also a good illustration of the empirical findings from our individual interviews, we will focus here on the discussion between these three people, who also represent three very different biographical trajectories after their return from the "bush". Many of the people we interviewed individually did not mention in their self-presentations (the first part of the interview, in which the person is invited to talk freely about his or her life) that after their return they felt discriminated against and excluded because of their past as soon as this became known to the people around them (see for example Hollander 2010: esp. 33–37). But at subsequent meetings, a number of them opened up and no longer followed the usual discourse of successful reconciliation with the civilian population, or of benefiting from "traditional" rituals which allegedly freed them from distressing nightmares, for example. Many admitted quite openly that sometimes they wish they could go back to the LRA or to their commander – who has since died or been killed – and that in some ways they were better off in the "bush" (see Luig 2012). Many of them miss, for instance, the camaraderie, the Sunday prayer gatherings, or the big celebrations in the rebel group.

Although the biographies of Lydia, Tom and Johann are discussed in detail in chapter 3, we will outline their life history again very briefly here. Lydia, who had been abducted at the age of about twelve[21], succeeded in running away after four years in which she was forced to marry an LRA commander and was repeatedly subjected to physical punishment (for various reasons, including creating too much smoke when cooking). After her return, she married again. Her second husband was a violent alcoholic; in 2014, when she was expecting her third child, he learnt of her past with the LRA and turned her out of his family's compound. She now lives near Gulu, in the compound of her father, who died when she was a small child, and her paternal uncle, who is married to her mother. Even in her own family she is often verbally abused because of her past and suspected of being possessed by evil spirits.[22] She tries to defend herself against these accusations, which she regards as unjust, and which also affect her children, and above all, she tries to hide this stigma outside the family. When asked by the interviewer to say more about this problem, she answers that if her first husband in the "bush" were still alive, she would probably have returned to him long ago. Lydia's mother has gone back to live with her maternal family, about 20 kilometers away from Lydia, after leaving her second husband because of his violence. Mother and daughter had not seen each other for years and only had brief contact shortly after Lydia's return from the LRA. Gabriele Rosenthal went with Lydia to visit her and interviewed her in the presence of her daughter. In this interview, the mother never once looked at or spoke to her daughter directly – unlike the other family members who were present. This fact, and the stories she

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[21] As a rule, the ages given are only guesses on the part of the interviewees; they are probably based on what they told NGOs or state authorities shortly after their return, and often contradict other information given by the interviewees or by members of their families.

[22] On the difficulties involved in "reintegrating" female LRA fighters in comparison to their male counterparts, see Hollander 2010; Luig 2012.

told, demonstrated clearly how alienated or inhibited the mother felt with regard to her daughter. Their relationship is also encumbered by the fact that when the abduction took place – Lydia was together with her older sister and two younger brothers – the mother pleaded with the rebels to take away only one child. This was Lydia.

Johann, who is about the same age as Lydia, was abducted in 2000 when he was aged somewhere between ten and twelve. Like Lydia, in the first days he was made to kill another child that had been abducted at the same time as him. But Johann was also forced to kill his mother and his father during a raid on his village. For this reason, he was not able to go back to his village after his return in 2007, and both his paternal and his maternal relatives refused to recognize his right to land. In a family interview with members of his mother's family, G. Rosenthal was told that the deceased souls had not yet spoken, so that they could not yet initiate an atonement ritual within the family (for example the one called "*mato oput*", a type of ritual that is prominent in the literature on northern Uganda), and therefore Johann could not live in the family compound. Today, Johann lives in the town. He had a girlfriend in Gulu but she left him when she heard of his past. Like Lydia, he tries to conceal his past as much as possible.

However, Johann is one of the few interviewees who speak openly about their nightmares. In his dreams he relives situations in which he was forced to kill other abducted children or his own parents – sometimes with extremely cruel and long drawn-out methods. We presume that it is the exclusion from his family, and the common knowledge in his village about how his parents were killed, that enables him to talk so freely, since *there is no question here of hiding the facts.* This situation probably also helps him to talk about the way he suffers from his past, his nightmares, his sleep problems and his fears of persecution.

In 1994, when he was abducted, Tom was probably only nine, and not twelve as he says. This is supported both by the stories he tells, and the information given by his family. He was able to return from the "bush" in 2010, after sixteen years, because he was "left behind" after being seriously injured in a battle with government soldiers, and was unable to kill himself, as he admits in answer to a question. Some time after this, his wife, Laura, who had been forced to marry him by the LRA, was able to flee together with the two children she had given birth to in the "bush". Tom's and Laura's biographies are good examples of abductees who return and are accepted by their families. Both Tom's family and Laura's family supported them in their plans to continue living as a married couple in civilian life. Laura and the children live part of the time with Tom in the town (where Tom has started up a small business), and the rest of the time in the compound of his family, or with her parents, who live about two hours' drive away, to help them with the harvest. Tom's closest relatives, including his deceased father's younger brother as head of the family, speak about Tom's past with understanding and sympathy. But the families of the other siblings of Tom's father exclude him and blame him for returning or surviving, for their own children have not come back and no one knows whether or by whom they

have been killed. Tom tells us that his position in his extended family has been weakened because of his past with the LRA. To this day they are "not happy with him", as he puts it. But he prays that they will be forgiven. In the interviews with Tom and members of his family, there are indications that they think that Tom himself could have killed one of their children. In an interview conducted by Artur Bogner, Tom's brother, who is eleven years older than Tom, emphasizes that Tom did not contribute to the killing of civilians or children from his region. Like many other interviewees, Tom says that immediately after his abduction, one child was forced to kill another child. He repeats several times in the interview that he witnessed this, but that he did not have to do it himself because he was so young then.

G. Rosenthal arranged a group interview with these three people because in the individual interviews with them they had indicated how much they missed opportunities to talk to other former rebels or child soldiers, and it was clear that they suffered from exclusion and discrimination, and from the consequences of multiple traumatization (including perceptible and recurrent fears of annihilation). The three interviewees quickly and eagerly agreed to meet each other. The meeting took place in a hut belonging to our hotel. At the beginning it was striking how warmly they greeted G. Rosenthal and the field assistant, Geoffrey Okello, while they greeted each other in a very reserved manner and avoided eye contact with each other. We already knew from the individual interviews that in the "bush" they had learnt to avoid forming close relationships with other abductees, because this could lead to very dangerous situations, and with time they learnt not to trust anybody. Then it turned out that Johann and Tom knew each other by sight, and lived not far from each other in the same town, but that *neither was aware of the other's past. In a brief discussion they agree that they need to conceal their past.* Then Johann begins his presentation with "I killed my parents" as his identity tag. It is Lydia who comforts him by saying he can't be blamed for this because he was ordered to do it. Then Johann, who works in a hairdressing salon, says that his boss has constantly teased and disparaged him after finding out by chance that he had been in the LRA (without knowing any further details):

> "From there ((when the boss heard about it)) my boss turned it into a joke that I am from the bush and that there is evil spirit over my head what, what and so on. That for me I have bad spirits and I should be quarrelling with customers and he brought a lot of issues. Nowadays they say I am full of bad spirit, I am working but I want to leave it."[23]

This sequence also earns him sympathy from the other two interviewees. Here reference is made to a "we", the "we" of the former child soldiers or rebels who suffer from discrimination. Turning to Johann, Tom says:

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[23] We quote (without corrections) not the oral translation, but G. Okello's subsequent written translation of the passages spoken and transcribed in Luo.

> "I am going to answer my brother like this, the way he said clearly that he is in town, that he was known only from home so I want to tell him that does not happen to him alone. That thing is happening to all of us the formerly abducted. If you are staying somewhere it is not known you are okay but soon as it is known even when you are walking, people will always backbiting you claiming you have been to the bush, this one has been to the bush (4). Let say if you happen to be in a place where something wrong happened and you are known to have been to the bush, the rest of the people who have not been to the bush will be left out, for you they will claim that bad spirit is disturbing you. It does not happen to him alone but also to all of us (okay) that is why most of the children who returned mainly stay here in town where there are many people, where they are not commonly known."

In this passage, Tom describes an essential strategy resorted to by the returnees who do not live with their families but in the town because of the anonymity it offers, or because they have no other choice: their time in the LRA is a discreditable stigma and requires a careful identity management (see Goffman 1963) aimed at concealing this phase of their life. It must not become known that they were in the LRA.

In the following sequence, Lydia describes her experience of being stigmatized because of her past. She also turns to Johann:

> "I want to tell my brother here that he should not worry about that thing because it is like our shield, it is not on you alone. Look, that is the reason my marriage is breaking up with my husband even now I have stayed home for four years. When got him, I produced with him two children married. That was before he learnt that I had been to the bush. Soon as he learnt about it, he complained about everything I said, telling me that it is the bad spirits of the people I killed etc. that forced us to separate. Even here on the place I am working ... ((an NGO that supports women without a money income)) you still hear statements like these people from the bush disturb people a lot, definitely it is the bad spirits that disturb, and so on. Whenever you are known to have been to the bush that issue will always arise. You should only remain strong after all, God has already delivered you from a tense situation, not easy to come back but God has allowed you to come back. Just hearing those things cannot do anything in your heart, won't hurt you physically (2). If you think of fighting back you will fight until you leave."

With this last sentence, Lydia argues that there is no point fighting against this kind of stigmatization or against accusations of being possessed by evil spirits because it is hopeless.

In this region it is not uncommon to experience such accusations, and that this case is different is shown by the fact that the former child soldiers regularly deny

such accusations, feel that their exclusion based on them is unjustified, and insist that they did not join the LRA voluntarily. Tom expresses this in ironical terms:

> "Indeed we have been to the bush, but we did not write any application that we wanted to join the bush, but there is also no way we can stop people from talking like that. From my side, if anyone told me that I have been to the bush, I would agree that indeed but what you are saying God is the one who should forgive you (hm) because it was not my wish to go there but you probably do not know what you are talking about and God should forgive you."

As these quotations show, the three former child soldiers formed a kind of bond in the course of the group interview, and when it was over they exchanged their mobile phone numbers and indicated that they would like to meet again. Lydia concluded by saying to G. Okello: "When you called me saying that Gabriela (a reference to Gabriele Rosenthal) wanted to meet with me and two other boys, I felt very happy, that we should meet and you continued to connect us. Today we met. Thank you very much."

The former child soldiers and abductees in Acholiland have hardly organized themselves in associations, and they scarcely discuss their past with each other, even on a private level, which is certainly due, at least in part, to the identity management strategy of concealing the fact that they fought for the LRA. Our findings show that those who now live with their families and in their home villages are very concerned to avoid any discussion of their past. They are also the ones who insist in their interviews with us that they did not have to kill civilians. We think it unlikely that these claims are always true, and we assume that this discourse is regularly required and practiced in their village communities and families, often because it seems the only way that close emotional relationships with the returnees can be re-established. Especially in individual interviews conducted in the presence of other inhabitants of the village, the interviewees repeatedly insist that they did not have to kill civilians and other abductees. They do not say this in answer to questions from us, but of their own accord. Thus, it is not an issue they can simply leave out but one which is imposed on them, as Alfred Schuetz put it (1970).

The shortage of networks and formal organizations among former child soldiers in Acholiland, and the more individualizing life stories presented in individual interviews, become very noticeable when compared to the relatively high degree of organization among the ex-rebels in West Nile and their clear framing of their life stories in the interviews as *collective* experiences. The reasons for these differences constitute a complex and entangled web, as we indicated at the beginning. One important difference is that the children abducted by the LRA in Acholiland were repeatedly traumatized over long periods, first by their abduction and then by many situations and life constellations inside and outside the LRA. We can assume that they experienced a sequential traumatization (Keilson 1992) which often began at a young age and moreover continued after their return from the "bush". In contrast

to the older rebels in West Nile, they were frequently abducted at an age when many young people are just beginning to make plans for the future and to develop a sense of solidarity with others of the same age. One of the consequences of such traumatization is often that their sense of belonging to humanity is impaired or destroyed, and replaced by feelings of alienation from others and a conviction that they do not belong. More often than the ex-rebels in West Nile, the child soldiers in Acholiland returned to starkly altered and fragile family constellations.

While the ex-rebels in West Nile can speak in local public spaces with self-respect or pride and relatively freely about their time in the "bush", this is hardly possible for the former child soldiers in Acholiland (unless they are among those who have meanwhile joined the government army); in other words, their past cannot help them (or to a much lesser degree) to develop a *collective self-esteem* that could back up their self-image and self-respect as an individual in the present.

5.4   Conclusion

Our comparison of two regions in northern Uganda in which various rebel organizations fought against the government for decades, or at least for several years, up to 2002 or 2006, and in which most of the surviving rebels have today returned to civilian life, reveals clear differences in perceptions of the past, present experiences, and the figuration of (former) rebels and civilians. For anyone not familiar with the perspective and experiences of the actors, it might seem that we are dealing in these two regions with very similar "post-conflict situations". They are adjacent provinces and they share similar regional collective histories that are embedded in the same pre-colonial, colonial and national macro-history. Moreover, there are close intertwinings or interactions between the two regions, their collective histories, and their rebellions or rebel movements. Nevertheless, the trajectories of the armed conflicts, and the processes of ending them, are very different. There are also big differences in the two regions in the present relationship to the central government, in other words, to the former enemy of their rebel groups. In this figuration, the former rebel fighters in West Nile have much greater power chances – at least within their local context – than the former child soldiers in Acholiland. This must be clearly underlined in view of the very widespread tendency in the recent literature to equate "northern Uganda" with Acholiland.

On the level of *everyday reality*, our empirical study shows that in both regions there are different figurations and relational dynamics between former rebel fighters and civilians. The returned abductees and child soldiers in Acholiland clearly occupy an outsider position within the civilian population. They do not form a we-group, they are not organized as such a group, and they have only a rudimentary we-image and collective memory. By contrast, the rebels in West Nile are a strong we-group with a clear we-image, they are much better organized and networked as veterans, and they occupy a relatively established position in their local setting. Depending on

the communicative context, their we-image includes all West Nilers or all "north-erners", and this image is hardly ever openly questioned, even by those civilians who suffered maltreatment at the hands of the rebels, for the sake of maintaining the peace that has reigned in the region since the peace accord concluded with the last local rebel group in 2002. By contrast, the former child soldiers in Acholiland are a fragmented grouping. They hardly constitute a we-group, and they feel thrown back on themselves as a result of the circumstances and consequences of their brutal ab-duction at a young age, and the traumatizing conditions of life in the LRA (whose organizational structure and ideology were radically different from those of the West Nile rebel groups). They are often rejected by the local civilian population, even if this goes against the public discourse in Acholiland and Uganda (which is dominated by the local and international "civil society"). The former LRA fighters, with their individual experiences of discrimination, suffer from this rejection and their own feelings of powerlessness much more than the former rebel fighters in West Nile, who, thanks to their high degree of organization, feel much more powerful in their social setting, and indeed possess far more autonomous power of action as a group. Not least, the we-image of the former West Nile rebels is constantly nurtured in veteran associations, an image that (as mentioned above, and unlike in the LRA) emphasizes the closeness of the rebels to the local population and their seamless unity. Moreover, their interpretation of their situation and their history is shared by many local (opinion) leaders and is hardly ever openly opposed.

Closing remarks. We wish to point out that further research is necessary on the relationships between civilians and former rebel fighters, and especially on the fig-urations and power balances formed by them, and the way these change in the course of time. And we are convinced that an adequate analysis of the local collective history and the present situation in such a (post-)conflict figuration is not possible without reconstructing the experiences and perspectives of members of diverse groupings – the families concerned and other local we-groups, including different socio-histori-cal generations. It is our belief that this is essential in order to be able to understand and explain the concrete dynamics of such a "post-conflict process" and the real problems involved in the "reintegration" of former combatants. This applies not only to rebel fighters and child soldiers, but all former soldiers or combatants of whatever kind. For this reason we are skeptical of general recommendations for the "reintegration" of ex-rebels and former child soldiers which ignore the local history and their concrete situation. Thus, it is often recommended in the literature to con-centrate aid efforts on comprehensive measures to promote education, employment opportunities and material income for a whole age group (partly in order to prevent discrimination and exclusion of the persons concerned within their social setting) (see for example Wessels 2009). This may be most desirable in abstract terms, and it may be opportune in political and "organizational" terms for humanitarian organi-zations, but in concrete reality it can lead to very different and unintended results.

Both for the analysis and for the terminology, it appears to us to be very problematic to neglect the differences between minors who were recruited as soldiers "voluntarily" (on the level of subjective experience) and possibly with the manifest approval of their families, and those who were abducted in an extremely violent fashion and suddenly found themselves in a state of total captivity or slavery. The relevant literature has recently gone even a step further in the downplaying of such differences by attempting – for understandable reasons – to replace the often too broad and too imprecise term "child soldiers" by that of "war-affected children".

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Transcription symbols

Speaker 1: and so #we went# Speaker 2: #hmhm yes#	simultaneous utterances
(says he)	approximate transcription
( )	incomprehensible (space between brackets approx. corresponding to length of passage)
((slowly)) ((coughs))	transcriber's comments, also descriptions of moods & non-verbal utterances or sounds
\... ((slowly))\	\ marks beginning and end of phenomenon
((vividly)) ...	general change of mood, probably continuing
,	brief pause
(5)	pause in full seconds
many mo- , more	sudden halt/ faltering / (self-)interruption
ye=yes	rapid speech, words closely linked
ye:s	sound lengthened
'yes'	softly, in a low voice
never	syllable (sound) stressed
NO	loudly
<u>**NE**</u>**VER**	stress (emphasis) during passage spoken in a loud voice

Long before "IS" and "Boko Haram", the messianic "Lord's Resistance Army" (LRA) in Uganda was considered as one of the most brutal rebel groups in Africa, or in the world, and as one which clearly specialized in the abduction, "recruitment" and deployment of children and adolescents as combatants. This book presents the results of a research project on former child soldiers and rebels in northern Uganda and their "reintegration" into society after their return to civilian life. The authors investigate their biographies and the social figurations or relationships between them and members of the civilian population that emerged following their return, not least in their families of origin, and show which conditions facilitate or hinder their "(re)integration" into civilian life. The discussion also shows what distinguishes them from former members of rebel groups in the neighboring region of West Nile, in respect of their history and how they were recruited, as well as in their present situation and social position.

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