Indoctrinate the Heart to Impunity

Rituals, Culture and Control
within the Lord's Resistance Army

HARVARD
HUMANITARIAN
INITIATIVE

"The training in the LRA was a ruthless act to indoctrinate the heart to impunity. The LRA combatants were inducted before taking them for any training. This induction was done when the Top Most Commander, Joseph Kony, sat down with the abductees and the first thing was discouraging escape from the army. That could even start with killing right away. That would introduce what character the soldier would need to behave. The behavior was taught together in assemblies. The behavior was generally violent... They sometimes tortured a person for over 100 lashes... In this, they said was to get the civilian spirit out of the person so that the person would start behaving as a soldier."

– Former combatant in Agago District, Uganda

Contents

1. Introduction

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has terrorized civilians in four countries across central Africa for more than two decades. The group is estimated to be responsible for the abduction of between 60,000 and 100,000 children and the displacement of over 2.5 million people across Uganda, South Sudan, the Central African Republic (CAR) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (United Nations Security Council [UNSC], 2013; Internal Displacement Monitoring Center [IDMC], 2013). Estimates put the number of deaths from the LRA between the tens of thousands (Ahere & Maina, 2013; Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2012) and over 100,000 people (UNSC, 2013). The group is able to create a footprint of terror disproportionate to its numbers through the perpetration of visible and extreme violence, including torture, mutilation and massacres.

The number of active combatants has greatly diminished since increasing military pressure has scattered the group over a wide swath of territory in South Sudan, the DRC and the CAR. From having between 3,000 and 5,000 active combatants at its peak (Lancaster, Lacaile, & Cakaj, 2011), the group is now estimated to have only 150 active combatants, not including a shifting number of abductees and non-combatant members (Ronan, 2015). Despite this, the LRA has been defined by an almost uncanny ability to endure in spite of intense military and political pressure. In fact, the number of LRA attacks and abductions rose in 2014, after having fallen in 2012 and 2013 (Ronan, 2015).

The cult-like qualities of the LRA—its magical rites and beliefs, its longevity and the enduring loyalty of its senior combatants—have long captured the attention of the world. Yet despite this focus, and notable military efforts to dismantle the command structure, the LRA endures, driven by the magnetism of its leader, Joseph Kony. This report will provide a rare insight into one of the most secretive groups in Africa by drawing on the narratives of more than one hundred former combatants and abductees from four countries. For instance, some of the most notable data come from mid-level combatants who were interviewed for this project just days after leaving the group. This is one of the only systematic efforts to gain insight into the internal command and decision-making structure of the LRA using qualitative data collected after the group moved out of northern Uganda in 2006 and into the DRC, the CAR and South Sudan.

Past studies have documented the internal dynamics of the LRA and the experiences of those who demobilized in northern Uganda (Beber & Blattman, 2013; Blattman & Gates, 2007; Blattman & Annan, 2010). Less is known, however, about the inner structure, decision making, and adaptations of the group after its move into the DRC, the CAR and South Sudan. The LRA of northern Uganda was often described as powerful and capable of astonishing levels of discipline within their ranks (Blattman & Gates, 2007). Despite these unique aspects and a strong cult-like personality, the LRA exhibits many of the same characteristics and motivations of other non-state armed groups (Cline, 2013). Understanding these factors illuminates how command and control decisions are made, why some of the most extreme forms of violence are ordered against civilians and their own members, and what intervention points exist to continue encouraging the defection of current combatants.

This report serves as a companion to the publication, *We Mobilized Ourselves: Community Resilience in Areas Impacted by the Lord's Resistance Army*, which examines community protection mechanisms in response to the LRA. While the companion report emphasizes the experiences of those exposed to and resisting LRA violence, this publication explores life from within the LRA. Former abductees and combatants describe the internal dynamics, command and control structures, customs, practices and rituals that define this highly organized group. Emphasis is placed on allowing the voices of these individuals to emerge through quotes and narratives. For a description of the history of the LRA and the timeline of the group's evolution, refer to the timeline on pages 7–8.

LRA
Conflict Timeline

1987-1988

Joseph Kony forms the group that will become the Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda.[1]

1991

UPDF mounts military offensive "Operation North." LRA retaliates against civilians.

Earliest sightings of LRA members in Eastern Equatoria and southern Sudan, are reported.[2]

1994

Betty Bigombe negotiates a tentative ceasefire. Yoweri Museveni reneges on those negotiations during a political rally; the violence continues.[3]

Sudanese government supplies LRA with food, weapons, and land in exchange for acting as a proxy in their war against the SPLA. Deadly attacks increase against civilians in northern Uganda and southern Sudan.

LRA relocates bases to Eastern Equatoria State, southern Sudan.[4] Attacks continue in Uganda.

1996

Ugandan government institutes policy of relocating civilians to protected camps.

1997

SPLA overruns LRA stronghold in Imatong Mountains. Kony and second-in-command Vincent Otti flee to Juba.[5]

1999

Carter Center brokers Nairobi agreement between the governments of Uganda and Sudan to end their proxy war; neither government observes the agreement.[6]

2000

Ugandan government enacts the Amnesty Act, granting pardons to Ugandans active or associated with the LRA.[7]

2001

U.S. places LRA on list of terrorist organizations.[8]

2002

UPDF launches "Operation Iron Fist" with permission from Sudan and logistical support from the U.S. LRA retaliates against civilians in southern Sudan and northern Uganda.

2004

UPDF launches "Operation Iron Fist II," which results in defections of LRA combatants and the freeing of abductees, as well as the intensification of violence and expansion of the LRA into previously unaffected territories.[10]

2005

ICC issues arrest warrants for Kony and four other commanders.

SPLA and Sudanese government sign Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

2005-2006

LRA leaves Eastern Equatoria. LRA establishes a base in the DRC's Garamba National Park while attacking civilians in Western Equatoria State, southern Sudan.[11]

2006

Riek Machar meets with LRA commanders in April to lay foundation for Juba Peace Talks.[12]

LRA and Government of Uganda sign the cessation of hostilities agreement in August.

2007

Kony orders the execution of Vincent Otti, who had been the point person for the Juba peace negotiations.

2008

First attacks are reported in the CAR in March as LRA combatants scout new base locations.[13]

Juba Peace Talks are suspended in April after Kony fails to sign final agreement.

Uganda, southern Sudan, the DRC, and the CAR, with support from the U.S. military, launch "Operation Lightning Thunder" in December.

The LRA retaliates by killing hundreds in the DRC and southern Sudan in what is known as the Christmas Massacres.

2009

Kony and the LRA relocate to Haut-Mbomou Prefecture in the CAR.

UPDF deploys to the CAR.

2009-2010

Kony and group of LRA combatants move to the Kafia Kingi enclave, a border region governed by Sudan.[14,15]

2010

Barack Obama signs the LRA Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act, dedicating U.S. support to governments of affected countries, the AU, and the UN.

Kony leaves a small group of combatants in Kafia Kingi and travels back to the CAR.[16]

2011

U.S. Special Forces arrive in the CAR and South Sudan[17] to support UPDF, FACA (in CAR), and SPLA (in South Sudan).

2012

The AU, with the support of the UN, and U.S. and European donors, launches the RCI-LRA and the AU-RTF.

The UN Security Council endorses a Regional Anti-LRA Strategy.[18]

Kony orders LRA troops to poach ivory in Garamba.

2012-2014

There are reports that Kony intermittently operates from Kafia Kingi and the neighboring CAR.[19]

2013

The AU-RTF launches "Operation Monsoon," which reportedly destroys an LRA camp in the CAR.[20]

The Government of Uganda reinstates the Amnesty Act, which lapsed in 2012. It applies to all but the top LRA commanders.[21]

U.S. advisors deploy to the DRC for the first time and begin to train the FARDC contingent of the RTF.[22]

2014

The U.S. temporarily deploys more personnel and aircraft equipment to AU-RTF forces.[23]

LRA commander Dominic Ongwen defects from the LRA in the CAR.

2015

Approximately 150 male combatants remain in the LRA, continuing to attack civilians in the CAR, the DRC, and to a lesser extent, South Sudan.[24]

1 Cline 2013; Van Acker, 2004; The Resolve, 2010; Dunn, 2004
2 Schomerus, 2007; 2012
3 Allen & Vlassenroot, 2010
4 Schomerus, 2007
5 Schomerus, 2007
6 Ronan & Poffenberger, 2013
7 Ahere & Maina, 2013
8 U.S. Department of State, 2012
9 Allen & Vlassenroot, 2010
10 Child Soldiers International, 2008
11 Ronan & Poffenberger, 2013; DRG & DDG, 2013
12 Ronan & Poffenberger, 2013
13 Ronan & Poffenberger, 2013; The Resolve, 2010
14 Ronan & Poffenberger, 2013
15 The Resolve and Invisible Children, 2014
16 The Resolve and Invisible Children, 2014
17 P.Ronan, personal communication, 2015, April 28
18 UN Department of Political Affairs, 2012.
19 The Resolve and Invisible Children, 2014
20 AU, 2013
21 IRIN, 30 May 2013
22 Agger, 2013
23 Arieff & Ploch, 2014
24 Ronan, 2015

the CAR. Qualitative work was then undertaken in sites currently affected by the LRA. The number of FGDs and KIIs conducted at each site varied according to the size of the local population. South Sudan and Uganda had relatively large communities with a variety of actors available for both FGDs and KIIs. In contrast, the communities in the CAR and the DRC affected by the LRA were much smaller, and so fewer FGDs and KIIs were conducted at these sites. The specific actors interviewed at each site depended on the composition of the community. Local researchers with backgrounds that included working in NGOs and on LRA issues were recruited to serve as advisors and data collectors. The local researchers were pivotal in providing guidance on local context and in editing the interview guides for relevance and applicability in each context. Details of all FGDs and KIIs are displayed in Tables 5-8.

2.2 Data Analysis

All KIIs and FGDs were audio-recorded to enable translation and accurate capture of the data. Audio files were transcribed, and then these transcripts were translated from local languages—Acholi in Uganda and Zande in South Sudan, the CAR and the DRC—to English. Two team members undertook close reading of the data to identify salient themes independently. Key themes and sub-themes were collaboratively defined, and a codebook was generated. Once data coding began, the codebook was modified by an iterative process to ensure that it reflected information from the data. This process allowed for the identification of key unifying topics, exploration of complexities in the narratives and generation of hypotheses where appropriate. Coding was done in NVivo 9 (QSR International, Cambridge, MA).

2. Methods

2.1 Data Collection

The data used for this report were drawn from a larger project looking at the impact of the LRA on communities in Uganda, the CAR, the DRC and South Sudan. These findings are taken from focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) with former combatants and formerly abducted persons. In each country field sites were chosen based on the amount of LRA activity they had experienced and their accessibility to research teams. Data were collected between May 2013 and February 2014. Uganda, as the country affected by the LRA for the longest amount of time, was chosen as the first site for fieldwork. Because the LRA is no longer active in this area, responses from Ugandan communities served as a historical case study that provided context and background for fieldwork in South Sudan, the DRC and

3. Results

3.1 Kony's Power, Isolation and Control: "All the orders were from above"

With a characteristic mix of pragmatism and superstition, Kony is navigating the new reality of the LRA. The picture that emerges from the data is of a mercurial but strategic man who continues to exert remarkable power over his group even as it becomes more dispersed. Former combatants describe how Kony has demoted top commanders as punishment for disobeying orders or becoming too autonomous. At the same time, in what might be a sign of increasing paranoia or isolation, he has almost exclusively surrounded himself by his guards, his wives and his children. Despite this sequestration, Kony retains control over seemingly small details of the group's functioning and the types of violence it perpetrates.

In the chilling example below, a respondent describes Kony's giving commands as banal as deciding which foods are to be eaten and as ruthless as ordering which abductees are to be executed. Here, a former combatant in a focus group from Kitgum district in Uganda discusses Kony's power over the details of their lives:

> Interviewee 1: There was no respect [for abductees]... when [the top command] stops you from killing, say, chicken or goats, because they do not want any blood spilled, then nobody is allowed to eat chicken or goat or slaughter anything to eat.

> Interviewer: So they would teach you even when not to slaughter anything to eat?

> Interviewee 2: [It was about] order! At 9:00 in the morning, they would receive a call from Sudan. All these people there had radio calls... sometimes it would be to start eating chicken, goats, or to kill all those abducted...

> Interviewer: So it means all the orders came from Kony?

> Interviewee: All the orders were from above, from Kony, directly from Sudan not from anywhere else.

This level of control was also described as volatile. Two long-term Ugandan combatants, in particular, spoke about Kony's changeable nature. As one described, "[Kony] always gave the orders. It was even very difficult to understand his mind. Even his closest commanders would not understand him."

Perhaps some of the mystery around his behavior is attributed to his perceived spiritual power, which was a defining influence on the LRA in the past. At the formation of the LRA, much of Kony's authority came from his followers' faith in his magical powers. Communion with the spirit world remains a central feature of his persona. Former abductees and combatants describe how Kony's mind would be possessed by spirits that give him information about the future that, in particular, helps him win military victories. He also purportedly uses his magic to see into other people's minds, for instance, to predict who is thinking of escaping. A former lieutenant described Kony as follows:

> When he is under the spirit, his conversation is different from his usual talks. Usually when he wants to talk to people, he writes everything in the book and reads and elaborates to people. But when he is under the spirit, he dresses in a white gown like a religious preacher and he sits on a chair then talks straight from his head. He will ask everyone to have a book and write down what he says and says, "Wait for an event which will soon happen." So you will tick from the list of events, which he predicts to happen. He also predicted the defection of his fighters to join the government. He said all of you who are now seated here, you will defect and fight against me someday, but you will not kill me. So people started to wonder how they will turn and fight against him...

The respondents for this project did, however, view Kony's magical power as waning—partly because Kony and the group had been weakened, and partly because Kony had started to break his own rules, including killing innocent civilians and drinking alcohol. Despite this, Kony seems to retain notable control over his units and their repertoires of violence. Kony's decisions related to civilians took on a personally vindictive quality when military pressure intensified on his group after the failed peace talks of 2008. In the same year, the Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF) in conjunction with the U.S. military launched an attack on LRA bases in the DRC. The operation destroyed LRA camps and scattered combatants across the CAR and the DRC (Schomerus & Tumutegyereize, 2009). In just one month, between December 2008 until January 2009, the LRA slaughtered more than 600 civilians in what has become known as the Christmas Massacres (Allen & Vlassenroot, 2010; HRW, 2009). Less than one

year later, 321 people were killed and 250 abducted by the LRA in the DRC over a period of four days, known as the Mokombo Massacre (HRW, 2010). In the following quote, a male former abductee from the CAR describes how the Christmas Massacres in the DRC was prompted by Kony's anger:

> Interviewee: Yes. Well on this, [Kony] says he does not hurt the community. He, Kony, he did not think he hurt anyone. So after the bombing in Garamba that he asked why the CAR, Congo and Sudan were against him. He then decided to go to any village and kill people as retribution. So that is how he made the decision.
>
> Interviewer: Did you hear orders given while in the bush?
>
> Interviewee: It is after that bombing that they started going to villages and kill many, because before they used to kidnap the young and leave the elders there. It is since Garamba that so many have been killed.

The quote highlights the extent to which Kony has retained tight control even over the way the group wields its diminishing power, and continues to advocate killing of weak civilians and the abduction of potential recruits. Letting go of all pretense of political aspirations, Kony has given orders to "simply survive." In fact, some scholars doubt that the group ever had serious political aims or intentions; Kony's political aims have been described, at best, as "opaque" (Cline, 2013, p. 21). Instead, the LRA's stated goals of overthrowing the Ugandan government and protecting Acholi identity may have been propaganda to win over the sympathy of an oppressed population. However, the move into new countries where this cause carried no valence, and the increased military pressure on the group, pushed Kony to command the group bluntly to splinter and "just take care of yourselves." Yet Kony still ordered the killing of civilians and spurred his commanders to maintain the numbers of the group through abduction in order to keep the

LRA strong. In a focus group with male ex-combatants, one respondent described how:

> All male abductees were asked to know that they were produced by their father and their fathers were produced by their forefathers. So, in the same way, they must abduct their own people so the number of the LRA continued to multiply. So in just two days the new recruits start abducting new people into the LRA.

A former abductee from the CAR described how, even as Kony accepted the transition to survival mode, he continued to dictate the behavior of the group towards civilians, and even detailed instructions about which individuals would be split into which groups.

> Interviewer: Okay, thank you. What was the objective of your group of six [people], was it just survival or [was there] a specific goal?
>
> Interviewee: No. We only left the larger group to reach a village and get supplies, to take food, and also to kill people because the commander has told us that, "If you see an elderly man or woman, kill them. If you see a baby, kill him. But if you see a young person who can walk, who could carry luggage, take him. You take him, put luggage on his back." So that is the beginning of Kony—the orders he gave us in the bush; if you are to go to a village, that is what you have to do, bring supplies and solid young people.

Yet the stated political goal of the group—to win power in Uganda—did still carry weight with long-term Ugandan fighters. Some of the recently defected commanders interviewed for this project cited disillusionment as one of the factors that pushed them to defect after decades of allegiance to the LRA. A lieutenant colonel who defected from the LRA days before his interview summarized feelings on this point:

> When we were just abducted, being young

> "All the orders were from above, from Kony, directly from Sudan not from anywhere else."

— Former combatant in Kitgum district, Uganda

and seeing [the LRA's] number we thought what they were saying about overthrowing the government was true and we thought they would accomplish it... But little by little while we grew up we started seeing that whatever they were saying was not true. It was not for overthrowing the government but for inflicting suffering on the people and that is what made us return. But what they, the big people, would say was that they are going to overthrow the government, although this was not it.

The highest levels of command retain an air of secrecy, especially for those recently abducted. Top commanders speak in a specialized language that others have difficulty understanding. At the highest levels, commanders do not refer to each other by specific rank, but instead refer to each other as lapwony or "teacher." Abductees or low-ranking soldiers were not allowed to make eye contact with Kony or any of the high-level commanders. Punishment for looking directly at someone in leadership was death, and the inability to make eye contact was cited as a characteristic of some of the abductees after leaving the LRA.

Decisions were made in small enclaves of top leadership, with Kony having the final say. Orders were then communicated to mid-level commanders and eventually to all subgroups.

3.2 Subgroup Dynamics: "Those specialized in committing atrocities"

Like any effective commander, Kony seems to know the individual character of each subgroup, and exploits this to his purpose. Respondents noted that all subgroups received the same general orders, such as when to loot and what supplies to seek. However, different groups specialized in certain tasks and types of violence. As one female former abductee bluntly stated, "The rebels were divided into groups just like you have said. I was not in the group of killers, nor did I belong to the group of chopping people with machetes. I was with those who used to burn houses, food or crops and even burnt people." The idea that certain subgroups specialized in committing particular atrocities emerged throughout the narratives of former combatants and abductees.

In particular, there were certain atrocities committed to punish civilian communities, either because they were perceived to have collaborated with the government, or because an abductee from that village had disobeyed the LRA. The following FGD between former combatants in the Kitgum district in Uganda is worth reproducing at length. The discussion emphasizes how Kony not only has the capacity to order atrocities, but also sometimes enforces restraint against killing civilians. This ability both to instigate and deter violence shows remarkable control over the group, as well as effective leverage of the characteristics of different subgroups. The following dialogue highlights this:

Interviewee 1: The overall top commander of the LRA knew very well the behaviors of his commanders... He knew which senior commander was capable of completing which task very well. There were those who were cowards, those who were very strong-hearted

and those who were fond of giving up. So when he wanted someone to lead a team for atrocities then he would assign the commander who was courageous enough to complete that mission. If the top commander wanted a serious attack on a village, he would task the commander he knew would accomplish the task accordingly. If he wanted his army to go and fight UPDF at some point, he knew which commander would complete the task well.

Interviewee 2: There was one who specialized in committing atrocities like for the case of Mucwini Massacre. That commander would never have any mercy at all. Nobody who was humble would be appointed a commander. Most of the commanders were very aggressive people. If that person was commanding a group and if anybody tended to remain behind, the commander could burn you with fire.

Interviewee 3: All those who were in the LRA, and where there were commanders, they called the groups battalions. A battalion would follow strictly the order of the commander. The orders would be issued for a particular period of time only. All the orders would be uniform whether for those in Gulu or in Pader, the same order. For instance, if the order was given for any soldier not to kill; therefore nobody was supposed to break that. Another time a new order would be issued and if a soldier broke that order then he would be killed.

> "I was not in the group of killers, nor did I belong to the group of chopping people with machetes. I was with those who used to burn houses, food or crops and even burnt people."
>
> — Former combatant in Agago District, Uganda

Respondents described how commanders were chosen for their effectiveness and ability to perpetrate violence and their disinclination to show restraint or mercy.[1] Those commanders who were most brutal and who brought the most looted goods were prized and promoted, incentivizing ambitious soldiers to "show off" to gain attention and reward. However, there seemed to be some leeway in the way that some orders were carried out. It was in this interpretative space that commanders' personalities emerged, as a former combatant from Aloi Parish, Agago District in Uganda, noted:

There are others who are good and do not commit atrocities. Others are bad and only wanted to kill. Some are good. They would abduct you and not do anything on you. There are those who would beat you and others even kill if you do anything...

While the data paint a picture of a commander firmly in control of the general behavior of the group, the narratives also highlight cases of individuals in the group who exhibited hyper-violent behavior, carrying out atrocities far beyond those ordered. So while mercy on the one hand was generally disincentivized or punished, hyper-violence on the other was not curbed. Some soldiers were described as so unstable ("crazy") that they could not be trusted with guns because they would begin shooting into their own ranks. A former colonel stated, "You should know that people are not the same. Some people do things on their own even if they are not told, some do things which are not in compliance with the rules, they do things which are not told to do, some are notorious; they act like they are crazy. They do things that are not told to do."

---

1   As one former combatant from Agago District noted in a focus group "Sometimes those commanders would want their ranks to be raised because if they went out and committed a lot of havoc on people and they brought something good to the top commander then the top commander would be happy. He might give them a higher rank."

The question arises: How does Kony's calculating leadership, and the character of each subgroup combine to turn new recruits with no sympathy for the LRA into members of the group? The next section explores the highly regimented and often savage process of inuring individuals to the group.

3.3 Abduction, Indoctrination and Survival: "What character the soldier would need to behave"

Abduction of civilians to become transporters, future fighters and sexual slaves has been central to sustaining the LRA. The shift into countries with alien languages, tribes and ethnicities proved an existential threat to a group that had been deeply rooted in Acholi identity politics of northern Uganda (Allen & Vlassenroot, 2010; Cline, 2013). Finding and keeping new people to fill the ranks presented a problem in countries that shared no common understanding with the group. In response, the LRA adapted its already ritualized indoctrination practices to become more ruthless and repressive. Specifically, the group used suppression of local languages and highly public violence to break ties with home communities systematically, and to re-form individuals into members of the LRA. An outline of these practices, based on themes emerging from respondents, is presented in Table 1.

When fighters were killed or more people were needed for transport, orders were given to abduct more people. Those who succeeded were rewarded with a higher rank. Calculated decisions dictated who was "disposable" versus who was kept as valuable to the LRA. Children were viewed as especially useful since they could be more easily indoctrinated and turned into fighters—a dynamic that has been documented in the wider literature on child soldiers (Beber & Blattman, 2013; Blattman & Gates, 2007; Blattman & Annan, 2010; Dallaire, 2011; Shepler, 2005; Singer 2005). As one community leader from Nzara, South Sudan, described in a focus group:

> They used to abduct children any time they

attacked us because they want to raise those children and train them as military... Children aged five and up, usually they don't kill them. So that was the way they behaved concerning the children.

Able-bodied boys and men were treated with special caution by the LRA. Though they held the potential to become effective fighters, they also posed the greatest risk of resistance. This is summarized by a male participant in the DRC who explained:

> When the LRA abducts men and the LRA knows these are able bodied-men, the LRA handles the men with caution and seriousness because the LRA knows these men pose danger. If any of the men try to escape, he is shot on the spot. The less able bodied-men were forced to carry the loots the LRA periodically got from the towns and villages they raided. Some men were recruited into the LRA and others were forced to guide and show the LRA the back routes of the villages.

Those who could not be assimilated into the group were treated as "disposable" and could be worked to death if they did not escape first; this might include men who could not be indoctrinated, the weak and the elderly. Respondents across all sites told a similar story: abductees were given unbearably heavy loads to carry, sometimes walking barefoot and for more than 24 hours on end. Often, they were given only scraps of food left by the combatants or not fed at all. Those who complained of fatigue were killed and left along the road. One story that captures this abuse was told by an ex-combatant in a focus group in Kitgum, Uganda:

> Let me give this example that I saw one day when we were walking: there was a grown up girl who said she was already tired of walking. The commander picked four rebels to take care of this girl. He said find her a resting place and these people immediately branched off with her into the bush.

Few minutes later they emerged from the bush without the girl. She was left behind dead. So for the rebels when you say you are tired, they will not let you remain behind or let you go. They will kill you because they fear you might inform the soldiers of their whereabouts.

Those who stayed in the group were forbidden to speak local languages for fear they would plan to escape—a finding emphasized in a previous project with LRA abductees (Kelly & Branham, 2012). As one former abductee from the CAR noted, "As for abductees, we were forbidden to speak in our Zande language as they thought we were planning to escape so we got beaten if we did. And if you did you were beaten about 200 times with a stick; we were forced to speak in the Acholi language."

Abductees were often exposed to, and forced to perpetrate, inhumanly cruel forms of violence. Tales of

newly captured individuals being forced to kill each other, and particularly being forced to kill family members, were common. As one community leader in Nzara, South Sudan, explained:

> One of the things that I have witnessed when I was there is when the LRA capture an individual with his or her father or mother they tie them with ropes and take them to the camp. On the way if the father or mother gets tired or sits down, they will order the detainee to kill his father or mother with a piece of wood. If he or she refuses, they will kill him or her. That is a true story; I have seen that with my own eyes.

Those who refused were killed by another abductee willing to carry out the violence. This seems to have been a ruthlessly swift way to select for those who would commit violence. An ex-combatant from Wol, Uganda, described how: "they asked an abductee to

kill a fellow abductee and if you don't do that, they would ask that person to kill you instead. Whether with knife or log you have to hit someone until you kill that person. If you are afraid to kill, then they ask another person to kill you." In two cases, abductees noted they were forced to fight each other, as one former combatant from Kitgum, Uganda, described: "so that the other people would watch like a video show."

The recurring theme of being forced to commit violence and murder, particularly against those in one's own family, seems to serve as a way to disconnect people psychologically from their civilian past. Killing is an ultimate rupture of the social contract, and committing murder seems to be a way of communicating to abductees that there is no way to return to their past life. This is reflected in some of the respondents' thoughts about this violence. As one former combatant from Agago District in Uganda described:

> The training in the LRA was a ruthless act to indoctrinate the heart to impunity. The LRA combatants were inducted before taking them for any training. This induction was done when the Top Most Commander, Joseph Kony, sat down with the abductees and the first thing was discouraging escape from the army. That could even start with killing right away. That would introduce what character the soldier would need to behave. The behavior was taught together in assemblies. The behavior was generally violent... they tortured a person for over 100 lashes... this, they sometimes said was to get the civilian spirit out of the person so that the person would start behaving as a soldier.

After a month or more, if male abductees had survived, LRA commanders began to get a sense of who might be susceptible to training. The metaphor of people's "forgetting home" was used to indicate when someone might be ready to be trained as a fighter. This training included violent rites and "trust tasks" that took one further and further from the camp, such as looking for water or food. Severe beating as a first step of indoctrination has been seen in other militia groups in Africa (Kelly, 2010). As in other cases, this physical suffering marked the passage from civilian to fighter status. Here, an ex-combatant from Kitgum calls the rite being "registered" into the group, "If you were already in abduction, say like for about three to four months, they would first start by torturing new abductees with caning (beating)... They called that as registering the new abductee into the army."

Trust tasks were given to those who seemed ready to join the LRA. A person might be told to collect water or fire wood, or search for food. If the abductee continued to return from these forays, he was trusted with increasing responsibility. Those abductees who seemed to be adapting to the group trust would undergo the final step of being trained as a combatant. This involved learning field craft and marksmanship as well as being sent into battle. Those who remained in the group as combatants could continue to gain status, and eventually earn a rank and be given a wife.

While there were descriptions of female combatants in the LRA during the group's time in Uganda, the vast majority of those trained were boys. Women who were put on the front lines of fighting were those who were unable to fulfill their defined gender role. The abduction of women, the control of gender dynamics and the formation of "family" units in the group was a fundamental part of maintaining group stability, as outlined in section 3.4.

Table 1. Behaviors Used to Control New Recruits

Theme	Illustrative Quote
Controlling language	They beat you because you are still new and not used to the life there. They want you to keep quiet and not to talk to fellow abductees because if they find you talking they will say you are planning to escape.
Forcing executions between abductees	You can imagine the emotional stress we faced. As a mother, you lactate, care for your child, and at the end they force you to lift up the pestle and pound your child nose in a mortar to death. This is the worst circumstance we have under gone through as women.
Killing of the weak and disobedient	People walked long distances with those heavy things and on bare foot. That journey ends and they started to kill people; they normally kill and cut the body into pieces with machetes and axes. They forced people to slaughter others and if you refuse, they will kill you instead.
Breaking of tribal or ethnic ties	The other thing that happened was that if five of you were abducted from same place like Wol and if one of them escaped, they would conclude that all of you would escape so they would take and kill all of you immediately.
Pitting abductees against each other	The LRA abducted people and while in the bush they would pair up people make them fight one another. If one of them defeated the other then they would again pick one other abducted person to fight you who is stronger until you are defeated just for their pleasure.

3.4 Gendered Relationships: "These women are taught and there is a leader who controls them"

The treatment of women in the LRA is regulated by a prescribed set of practices enforced by long-term combatants. Despite the LRA's dispersal into subgroups separated by large geographic areas, descriptions of the rules, patterns and customs of the treatment of women are remarkably similar across all respondents. These strict norms seemed to serve a number of important functions, including: ensuring the control of women by assigned commanders, tamping down competition and discord by having strict rules about sexual relations, controlling sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), creating stability and consistency by creating "families" and propagating LRA through childbearing.

Some armed groups, such as the Mai Mai in eastern DRC, place few if any effective restraints on rebel soldiers' treatment of women. In a situation characterized by miserable living conditions and material deprivation, rape and sexual slavery may serve as one of the few opportunities for soldiers to feel a sense of power and control. While some Mai Mai soldiers form long-term relationships (consensual or non-consensual) with women, they do not describe being subject to systems of control governing the treatment of women.[2] The Mai Mai example here is illustrative of how at least one non-state armed group in Africa treats women, and serves as a counterpoint to the LRA example. In sharp contrast to the Mai Mai, almost every aspect of sexual relations is highly controlled in the LRA—from distribution of women, to rules around how "widows" of killed combatants are treated to practices that promote child bearing by "wives."

Respondents in this study and previous LRA projects

_____

2 Different Mai Mai subgroups had different stated attitudes towards sexual violence. Some noted that rape was against their founding beliefs, but in practice this provided little if any disincentive to abuse women. In general, high-ranking Mai Mai commanders had first choice of girls and may have had access to a greater number of sex slaves, but these practices reflect a general entitlement of higher command rather than a recognized set of rules around women (Kelly, 2010).

emphasized that girls and boys, and men and women, were at equal risk of abduction by the LRA. However, once captured, male and female abductees served very discrete, gendered roles. Women and girls serve as wives, collect fire wood, cook, take care of children, wash clothes and transport household goods. Rituals around washing and housekeeping, such as how and when to wash and how to take care of the household, were taught. As one former lieutenant described when speaking of women, "If you wake up in the morning, before beginning to cook, you must take a bath, wash the dishes and put them to dry and when you are taking food to the commanders, you must change your clothes and make sure you are clean."

When abducted, girls and women were distributed to LRA soldiers. Men had to achieve a certain rank or standing in the group in order to be given a "wife;" transporters and those in training were not given access to women. Most often, this distribution was described as entirely arbitrary. Random allocation of women may have been a way to prevent discord and competition in the group by making sure distribution was seen as random and decisive.

One way female abductees were assigned to a soldier involved putting all of the soldiers' guns in the middle of a circle. The abductees would pick a gun at random, and then they would "belong" to the weapon's owner. A widely described taboo was that very young girls (called *Ting Ting* in the LRA) were given as slaves to their eventual husband, but they were not supposed to become sexually active until they had reached the age of roughly 12. In a focus group of female former abductees in Lele Chu Village, Uganda, one respondent explained:

> They would say this is your *Ting Ting* and keep her. Each one should keep his own. So these men would keep the young girls and as soon as the breasts started showing up on their chests, these men became their husbands.
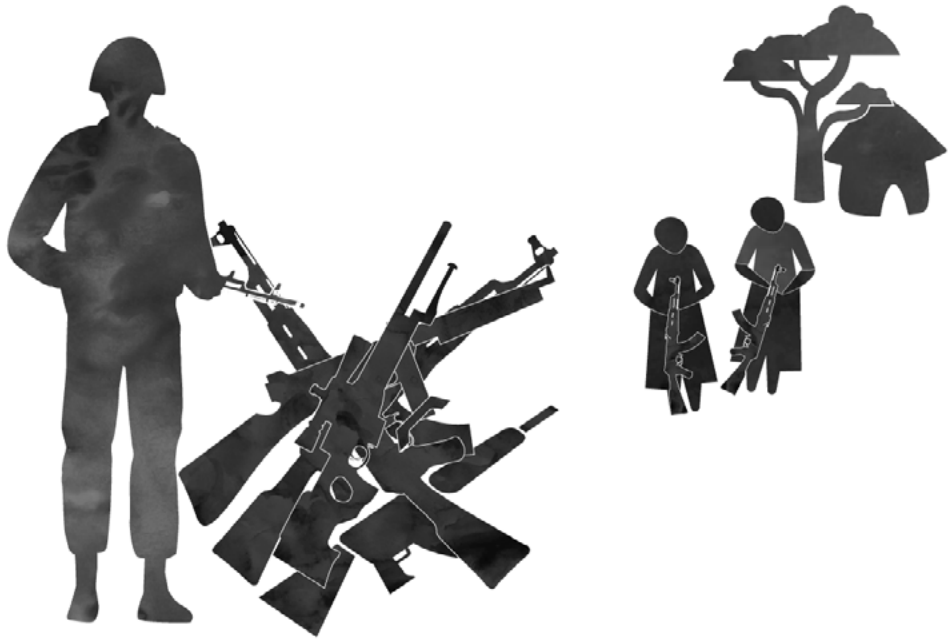
"…you were to clean your gun and line it up with others' who qualified. So they would instruct the women to pick one those guns each and the gun you picked the owner would become your husband. There would be no complaint, whether old or young, you must accept."

– Former combatant in Soloti Village, Uganda

The distribution of women to specific commanders helped maintain order in the group. Each person, whatever his or her role, had a defined place and was under the command of a specific person. The creation of stable "family" units in the LRA helped ensure that each woman was controlled by someone, and therefore would be less likely to be unsupervised or to escape. Deviating from this structure by having sex with someone who was not your assigned partner was punished by beating or death. The strict regulations around keeping women for one combatant and one combatant only may have served another purpose: control of HIV and STIs in the group. This was never

mentioned explicitly by respondents. However, STIs, and particularly HIV, are suspected to be rampant in the LRA. The group formed in the late 1980s when the HIV epidemic was peaking in Uganda. Anecdotal evidence from women who escaped the LRA in South Sudan shows that the many women leaving the group were HIV positive and were being treated with antiretroviral (ARV) drugs.[3] A UPDF clinic in Obo, CAR, which received demobilizing LRA, found that roughly 50% of

_____

3 Author's own experience from meeting with former abductees in South Sudan in August 2015.

> "They would say this is your *ting ting* and keep her. Each one should keep his own. So these men would keep the young girls and as soon as the breasts start showing up on their chests, these men become their husbands."

– Female former abductee in Lele Chu Village, Uganda

Table 2. Reasons for Tightly Controlled "Family Units"

Theme	Illustrative Quote
"Contracting out" control of women to assigned commanders	These women are taught and there is a leader who controls them whose work is to see that the different teachings are followed and is being used.
Tamping down competition and discord by having strict rules about sexual relations	So they would instruct the women to pick one those guns each and the owner of the gun you picked would become your husband. There would be no complaint, whether old or young, you must accept.
Controlling STIs/HIV through sexual exclusivity	…For example if I have a wife, my wife should not again have a relationship with another man. If that happens and she had sexual relations with him, both of them can be picked and killed.
Creating stable family units that provide unique consistency and order in an existence consisting of constant movement	The situation there was spiritual because everyone was not allowed to secretly have sex with another.
Propagating LRA through pregnancy	… If I, as a woman, have stayed in the bush for long, I am given a man as my husband. But if I have not delivered a child yet, we have lived together with this man as husband and wife, I will be taken to fight among the men because I cannot play my role of childbearing. That means I am more of a man and thus have to play the men's role to fight.

combatants tested positive for HIV/AIDS.[4] Finally, one male former lieutenant noted that Kony performed a mass healing ritual to cure people in his group of the virus.[5] Taken together, these facts suggest that HIV/AIDS is a significant problem in the LRA, and of concern to Kony. Stable family units serve a number of strategic functions within the group, control of STIs possibly being among these.

Female combatants were trained while the LRA was still active in Uganda (Annan et al, 2009). However, this practice seems to have largely ceased by the time the group moved into other countries. Respondents from Uganda noted that an exception exists for those women who did not make suitable wives. Those who were too old, not desirable (perhaps because of mental trauma), weak or sick were killed, used as transporters or trained to go into combat. An ex-combatant in Paimol, Uganda, noted in a focus group:

> For the women who do not produce children, they are trained and taught the rules of soldiers. They will take you a woman with a group of soldiers. Among them there are two guns. One is given to you and the other to one of the soldiers. He will start training you on how to disassemble the gun and reassemble it; how to fire the gun, to dodge the bullets when fired. They will tell you to run straight ahead when you are being fired at and fall down when fired over your head to avoid being shot at and this is done when he is firing at you. There is no training in marching or parade as done with the army training. Theirs is only how to handle and manage a gun.

A particular emphasis was placed on women's bearing children in the LRA. Kony himself has three grown sons that he has placed in leadership positions in the group. For regular combatants, it is improbable that children conceived in the LRA are kept in the group until old enough to fight. Despite this, importance was placed on the idea of propagating through bearing children. It might also serve to strengthen bonds between combatants and their "wives" and make women less likely or able to escape. In a group characterized by harsh treatment, women who had just given birth were afforded rare consideration: "The woman who had just delivered was very much guarded, but when the child starts to sit alone the mother would be taken for attacks." As noted before, those women who could not fulfill the expectation of childbearing were sent into combat: "For the women who do not produce children, they are trained and taught the rules of soldiers. They will take you as a woman with a group of soldiers." Protecting women who bore children from combat and conscripting women who could not become pregnant were described only by respondents from Uganda, suggesting these practices may have declined after the group's dispersal into other countries.

---

4 Author's visit to UPDF clinic treating LRA defectors in Obo, CAR, in January 2014.

5 He said, "A long time ago, some people who were HIV positive were asked to stand up, people were asked, 'have you seen those who are standing up, these people are HIV positive and we are going to cure them.' [Kony] gave them medicine and the people survived and they did not die."

The LRA's treatment of women included a unique practice related to widowhood. Women who had been the wife of a combatant who died were then allowed to choose their next partner in the group. This may have been done in order to keep these women, who were now accustomed to the group, from trying to escape. However, women who had been widowed a number of times were seen as "unlucky," and either they were not allowed to choose a partner or they would be sent into combat. Those who broke taboos were punished by beating or death. Taboos for the men included becoming interested in a woman who had survived a number of husbands (and therefore was seen as bad luck), or sleeping with another man's wife. Speaking of a former comrade, one ex-combatant said, "He was killed. He was murdered because he slept with another girl [who was not his]; when he had sex with that girl, he was put in prison. Then he was shot." A former lieutenant further described this, saying:

> For example, if I have a wife, my wife should not again have a relationship with another man; if that happens and she had sexual relations with him, both of them can be picked and killed. This is what happens in the bush. If you already have a husband you must have just that one man and not go out to another man... if they get to know about [infidelity], if you are not killed, both of you will receive a serious number of beatings. That is what is there because even if you as a man can have like 4 or 5 wives, all the 5 women must follow what the one man tells them and must not cheat on him with another man. She must do what the order says and wants, and she will survive.

Yet, at least one taboo seems to have been ignored recently within the LRA. Rape, and even public rape of abductees, seems to be increasingly common and tolerated within the group. LRA doctrine dictates that women be brought to the group and distributed to commanders. Rape of women (by anyone other than the person she is given to) is strictly forbidden. However, there was evidence that rape of

new abductees was becoming increasingly common. Respondents from South Sudan, the DRC and the CAR described rape of abductees in public, suggesting this had become widespread only after the group left Uganda, and command and control broke down. This behavior seems out of character with former LRA practices, and could be an indication of loosening discipline within the group. As one former abductee in the DRC noted, "If you reach a place where you will spend a night, [LRA soldiers] will come and select any woman of their choice and force you to have sex in public. Even the women who were with their husband they sleep with her in the presence of their husbands."

The forced formation of family units is a defining characteristic of the LRA, and distinct from practices in many other non-state armed groups in Africa, which have a much more laissez-faire attitude toward letting combatants form unions. Potential reasons for these practices, based on themes emerging from respondents are outlined in Table 2.

Table 3. Types of Magical Rites

Theme	Illustrative Quote
Ritual cutting	They gave the children herbs, cut parts of their body and put the local herbs in it. They also gave the young boys opium. We could see this when the children come out as they smell badly with herbs. The young boys even drank some herbs... [As for girls] they cut their waist and shoulder, put there herbs so that these girls could carry more luggage since the journey was a long one...
Use of powder, paste, herbs or oil	The powder is some kind of peanut butter. Some is pressed on the head, some on the back and then some is placed in a cut on the skin made with a razor as a type of vaccine. These are the marks ...
Amulets	It is one among them who they call a 'marabout' who would give them away. Everyone put on a shirt and the fetish is placed close to the heart.

3.5 Magical Practices: "The magic is still working in their bodies"

The use of magic to control both men and women in the LRA is a defining characteristic of the group, and merits its own discussion, particularly since the perceived power of magic has implications for demobilization and reintegration into civilian communities. The importance of magical beliefs in the LRA has been well documented. A study of formerly abducted youth found that the application of magical rites was a key part of the indoctrination process for children abducted by the LRA (Kelly & Branham, 2012). The respondents in this project also emphasized this link. Almost all mentions of magical fetishes, or gris gris, in this project were associated with indoctrination, with taking on the LRA identity and with lasting impact on one's mind. The LRA's use of magic in indoctrination and psychological control probably derived from

Kony's reputation as a spiritual medium. But use of charms and gris gris on a regular basis in each subgroup evolved to be distinct from the believed magical power of Kony. Magical rites varied by group, but could include ritual cutting; placement of powder, paste, herbs or oil on the body; and wearing amulets (see Table 3). A number of recurring metaphors were used to describe the magic, including being "vaccinated," "baptized" and "injected" with magic. As one respondent stated, "...You start by the training first— they have their own traditional practices there—they inject it in you until you forget your home and get effectively trained. As soon as you are ready based on their criteria, then you go in the field." Ritual cutting also seemed to take on a symbolic value. To help people carry heavier loads, cuts were made on the shoulders and waist. To keep people from running away, legs were cut.

Magic rites were saved for those who would serve a purpose in the group. As noted earlier in this report, older individuals were used as transporters and sometimes were worked to death. Since they were seen as "expendable," they did not receive these rituals. Instead, gris gris was reserved for the children and youth who would be integrated into the LRA. As one respondent described, "It was only the children who were smeared or injected with the magic oil, that is why they never got out. In fact the rebels only smeared young girls and boys, and the old ones were to carry luggage and when they got tired they could kill those who were tired of carrying luggage."

Respondents noted that the magical indoctrination served a number of purposes, including making one unable to escape, causing one to "forget home" and by extension the civilian mindset, perpetrating violence, receiving protection during battle, fighting fearlessly, becoming attached to life in the bush and killing other humans (see Table 4).

Some respondents abducted by the LRA described how magic helped you "see people as animals," a mindset that was cultivated deliberately and with care to make abductees capable of violence.

A young female former abductee recounted in vivid detail how rituals were used to train new abductees to dehumanize others:

> Interviewee: What I saw in the bush was terrible. The rebels cut the bodies of the young boys and girls and put their magical herbs or oil in the bodies of these young boys and girls. After that, they could ask the boys and girls to tell whether they had seen an animal, when the boys and girls said they saw no animal, the rebels could add more magical herbs or oil until when they boys and girls said 'Yes, we have seen an animal.' Then the young boys and girls were told to kill the animal they have seen by beating, breaking the neck and cutting using machetes. After that, the boys and girls were asked to laugh and rejoice the killing of the person who was seen as an animal. That is how they trained and taught the young boys and girls who were abducted. In addition, they chopped people's legs and put their magic herbs on them to enable them carry luggage, and those who could not carry were killed. The rebels made us stay in front as we moved so that they could kill the weak ones who could not carry heavy luggage.

> Interviewer: Which type of work was given to the young boys that the rebels cut their legs and put magic oil on? How do you think this magic oil can be removed from the bodies of these young boys after they have been released to enable them to have a better or normal life in the future?

> Interviewee: The young boys' duty was to kill people in the ways that they were taught. Regarding the issue of removing the magic from the bodies, they should find a way to remove the magic because we don't have any means to remove the magic from their bodies. Furthermore, [the returnees] are not stable or normal. Sometimes they say they want to go to the bush, and sometimes they hit anything around them, which shows that the magic is still working in their bodies. On some days they don't like to wear clothes and prefer to stay with uncovered bodies. This scares us a lot and we don't know what we can do to remove the magic from their bodies. The children and other people who got out are not stable or normal and we don't know whether they will be normal again.
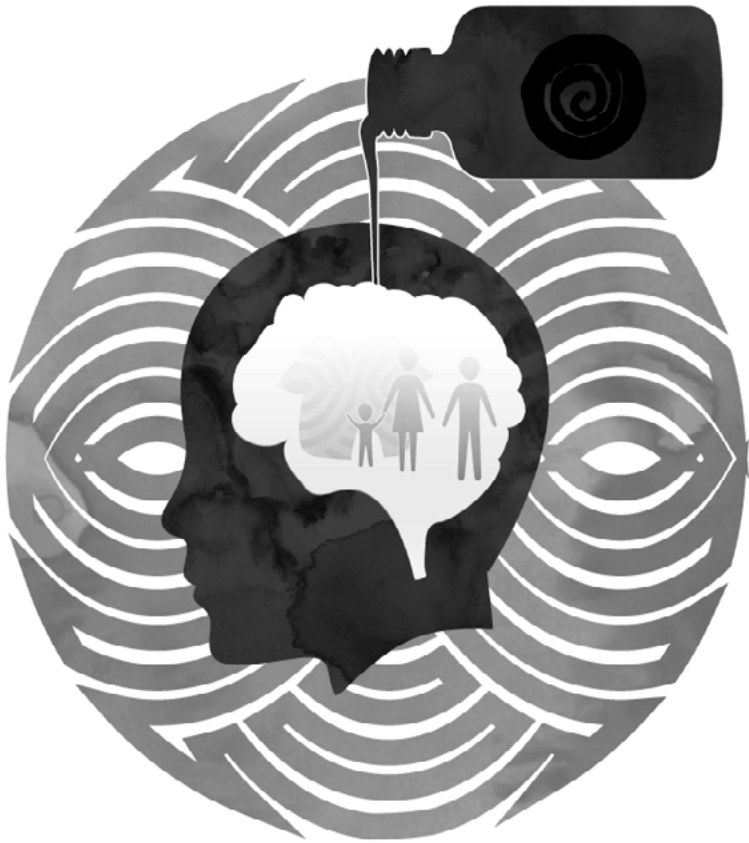
"...they have their own traditional practices there. They inject it in you until you forget your home... I mean traditional medicines that take your fear away, that take away your willingness to go home and so you stay there."

– Leader of LRA victims association in Obo, the CAR

Table 4. Perceived Consequences of Magical Rites

Theme	Illustrative Quote
Forgetting home/being unable to escape	I mean traditional medicines that take your fear away, that take away your willingness to go home and so you stay there.
Seeing others as animals	Those people still see others like animals or like what they are used to in the bush, they should be taken to a place like church for prayers so that they can become normal and live in peace like the rest of us.
Taking on violent behavior	We hear that children in the bush are put under spells and rituals that sort of relate to the Acholi tradition; it almost is like bewitching, which makes them feel nothing when they kill.
Presenting PTSD-like symptoms	"[Abductee's] minds are not stable because of the magic oil they were injected or smeared with….

The last part of this quote highlights one of the most persistent findings—that receiving magical rites was associated with negative changes in one's behavior and mental health problems. Community members described how former abductees have persistent anger and exhibit other anti-social behavior, which is directly linked to magic from the LRA:

> The problem was that shortly after they were released, they were not normal because of the magic or traditional herbs they were injected with while in the bush… From time to time, some of them do get angry because the magic or traditional herbs are still in their bodies.

Since the application of magic is seen as a supernatural force, the spiritual power of prayer is seen as a countervailing, healing force. Prayer and counseling are seen as the only ways to address the behavioral problems that are associated with magic. The importance of prayer in psychological healing was emphasized across project sites.

However, both prayer and counseling were often seen as inadequate to truly address the trauma experienced in the LRA. An informal review of counseling efforts in the communities visited for the project showed that efforts are often undertaken by clergy or by NGO personnel. While beneficiaries of these efforts found them helpful, they were often undertaken by individuals without formal mental health training, who provided sporadic or short-term interventions. For instance, a local NGO in Yambio, South Sudan, convenes group counseling sessions twice a month for former abductees, but the meetings depend on funding availability and are moderated by local staff without a background in mental health. Despite this, abductees note that speaking about their experiences with others is still beneficial. Unfortunately, there are few efforts to work with religious leaders to incorporate mental health programming into religious interventions.

SIDEBAR 1:

Evasion: "No one can even see the way"

Despite intense military pressure, and attempts to track the LRA by national armies in the countries in which the group operates, the LRA remains elusive. Decades of evading capture have given rise to sophisticated systems to escape detection. Former combatants and abductees detailed techniques to confuse pursuers. In the following quote, a respondent notes matter-of-factly that these techniques may have seemed like magic to some, and contributed to the LRA's mystique. But he goes on to describe how roads were made to "disappear" by covering them with brush and using cut trees and water to obscure the path.

> *Interviewee: Well the [LRA] army may just decide to disappear, this does not mean that it is a miracle, but it is a tactic. We may move thirty in a group and passing the main barrack, suddenly you find the road you used has disappeared.*
> *Interviewer: …So no one can identify the way?*
> *Interviewee: No one can even see the way.*

Finally, respondents noted that splitting the group in two and taking diverging roads confused potential followers. The group would then reconvene at a predetermined point. One former abductee said a woman in their group was skilled at "disorganizing" footsteps. When the group passed a sandy patch, she would cover signs of footsteps to make it look as if chickens had been scratching the earth.

A former lieutenant described a number of ways his group evaded detection in the bush. One particularly sophisticated technique involved burning grass. The group would pass along while the grass was still smoldering. By the time they had passed, it had turned into ash which could easily be blown away. They then had the women and children walk on the cleared road, leaving a "civilian" footprint. Other times, the group would tread in the exact footprint of the person in front to make it look as if only one person had passed.

4. Conclusion

Data from this project paint a picture of the LRA as an increasingly dispersed group that has shifted deliberately into survival mode. Yet it would be a mistake to equate this shift with the inevitable demise of the group. Descriptions of Kony depict a man who is increasingly isolated yet retains a remarkable level of control over his fighters. The combatants interviewed for this project describe in detail how Kony's orders dictate the group's repertoire of violence against civilian communities. Their narratives paint a picture of a man whose caprice and vindictiveness have resulted in massacres and terror. Consistently, his commands have been the driving force behind the horrific violence against civilians. His decrees—from what food to eat, to whether to kill abductees—are transmitted through a well-organized chain of command and acted upon.

Respondents described how commanders were chosen for their effectiveness and ability to perpetrate violence. Those commanders who were most brutal and most effective at looting goods and abducting new recruits were rewarded and promoted. They describe a leader who leverages detailed knowledge of the psychology of his top commanders to ensure the most vicious fighters are sent to perpetrate the most gruesome violence, and more restrained fighters are sent for routine looting missions. Some of the most detailed data come from mid-level combatants who were interviewed for this project just days after leaving the group. They cited general disillusionment as reasons for leaving after some had spent more than a decade as highly effective fighters. Their story seems to be the story of the group as a whole. Just as awe for Kony's omniscience and magical power has frayed, so too has the physical structure of the group begun to fragment. Respondents describe how, hoping to evade detection and increase chances for survival, the LRA dispersed into smaller subgroups. Often, these units will have only a few seasoned fighters who enforce discipline among newer abductees. Yet, the group continues to persevere and to create an environment that fosters insecurity with wide implications for regional security.

With the numbers of LRA combatants decreasing, there may be a sense that the international community can now turn its attention away from LRA issues. There are a number of reasons why this would be a grave misjudgment. The LRA's successful subsistence in central Africa has created a space of instability and violence that will persist as long as the group is active. In this space, road bandits , or coupeurs de route, and small roving armed groups continue to prey on civilians. The environment of general insecurity and impunity is becoming increasingly entrenched in a part of Africa that links the east and west coasts. Ecosystems of illegal trade, including wildlife trafficking and poaching, will remain active as long as the LRA leverages these systems.

In 2006, as military pressure pushed the LRA from its place of origin and into countries with distinct social, political and tribal identities, the LRA evolved new practices to subsist in these novel environments. The LRA was able to inspire extraordinary loyalty among its recruits from Uganda, even after demobilization. Blattman and Annan write that, of those abducted for more than two weeks, almost half (44%) state they still felt allegiance to Kony, roughly a quarter described feeling they were dependable fighters, and 1 in 5 stated that there was a time when they felt like staying with the LRA (Allen & Vlassenroot, 2010, Chapter 7). These feelings are reported at even higher levels among those staying in the group for more than a year.

In new environments, the group struggled to maintain its cohesion and cult-like identity as fighters began to abduct individuals with whom they shared no linguistic or cultural background. Long-term combatants adopted new practices to ensure submission of abductees, including punishing the use of any language other than Acholi, and using violence such as forced killing to break tribal and ethnic ties. These rituals have been documented in a previous report on children who had been abducted into the LRA in the DRC (Kelly & Branham, 2012). But this indoctrination, while serving to keep the group active, also seems to be fleeting and instrumental. Returnees interviewed for this report describe going through the motions of obedience, and biding their time to escape as soon as the opportunity presented itself. While there is clear bias in the fact that we are interviewing those who have escaped (rather than those still in the group), these individuals describe a wider dynamic of fluid survivalism in the LRA. The persistent loyalty and awe of leadership members of the LRA felt in the 1990s and 2000s has given way to a group held together by focal points of experienced combatants who break away periodically to loot, abduct and evade capture in the wilderness of the tri-border region between the DRC, the CAR and South Sudan; this serves to highlight the remarkable persistence of the group, while also opening opportunities to improve demobilization efforts and encourage defection.

The control of gender relations and the use of magic are both vital tools in the manipulation of members of

the group. The detailed regulation of sexual abuses—and its apparent inconsistency with permissive attitudes to other kinds of (non-sexual) violence—has been explored by other scholars. Baines (2014) postulates that forced marriages were a way to maintain control over the group while also serving to promote the ideal of populating a "new Acholi nation" through procreation. Kramer (2012) notes that women are used as status markers by the LRA in an environment where material goods and pay are scarce. Promoting exclusive unions between combatants and women also served to create relationships that promoted stability and interdependence between members of the group. This research reinforces these findings and suggests additional reasons for family units. "Assigning" women and girls to commanders assures the control of these individuals and may speed indoctrination into the group. It may also discourage competition and discord by enforcing strict rules about sexual relations and suppress the spread of STIs, including HIV, through sexual exclusivity. The narratives of public rape by those in the CAR, the DRC and South Sudan (but not Uganda) suggest that the repression of unsanctioned rape has weakened, and may be a bellwether for a trend toward a general slackening of control.

Magical beliefs and rituals also served to regulate the behavior of LRA members. A number of scholars have shown how "mystical" systems, in fact, serve highly specific strategic functions in armed groups in Africa (Cline, 2013; Titeka, K., in Allen & Vlassenroot, 2010; Wlodarczyk, 2004). In the LRA, magic serves to prevent people from escaping, incite higher levels of motivation, provide legitimacy to the group and its commander, foster group cohesion and intimidate civilian populations. In fact, we see that Acholi populations in Uganda even now express fear of, and belief in, Kony's spiritual power (Beber & Blattman, 2013). We have found that fear of LRA magic is a critical barrier to reintegration. Whole communities hold the belief that if gris gris has "infected" combatants and new recruits, they exhibit violent behavior and cannot resume civilian life. What is known as magical possession locally would, of course, be represented as mental health problems in western cultures. Whatever

representation one chooses to adopt, it is clear that healing from trauma and mental health counseling are vitally important for those leaving the group, as well as for civilians living in affected communities.

These results point to a number of potential interventions. At the community level, programs should continue to strengthen leadership committees that are focal points for early warning outreach. These leadership committees, when supported and trained, also serve as effective peace-building mechanisms and avenues for conflict resolution. Churches and religious leaders have had a powerful role in supporting community healing. Combining the spiritual authority of the church with evidence-based mental health counseling could prove a promising avenue for addressing the trauma of those affected by the LRA going forward. Finally, attention should remain on dismantling the LRA as a vital and lasting step to ensuring regional security.

5. Bibliography

Ahere, J., & Maina, G. (2013, March). *The never-ending pursuit of the Lord's Resistance Army: An analysis of the Regional Cooperative Initiative for the Elimination of the LRA.* Policy and Practice Brief, No. 24. Accord. Retrieved from http://www.accord.org.za/images/downloads/brief/ACCORD-policy-practice-brief-24.pdf

Allen, T., & Vlassenroot, K. (2010). Introduction. In T. Allen & K. Vlassenroot (Eds.), *The Lord's Resistance Army: Myth and reality* (1-21). London: Zed Books.

Annan, J., Blattman, C., Mazurana, D., & Carlson, K. (2009). Women and girls at war: 'Wives', mothers and fighters in the Lord's Resistance Army. Unpublished manuscript. Retrieved from http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Dyan_Mazurana/publication/237426348_Women_and_Girls_at_War_Wives_Mothers_and_Fighters_in_the_Lord's_Resistance_Army/links/0a85e53c0076cdcd42000000.pdf

Baines, E. (2014). Forced marriage as a political project. Sexual rules and relations in the Lord's Resistance Army. *Journal of Peace Research,* 51(3) 405-417.

Beber, B., & Blattman, C. (2013). The logic of child soldiering and coercion. *International Organization, 67*(01), 65-104.

Blattman, C., & Annan, J. (2010). The consequences of child soldiering. *The Review of Economics and Statistics, 92*(4), 882-898.

Blattman, C., & Gates, S. (2007, March). The causes of child soldiering: Theory and evidence from northern Uganda. In *Annual Convention of the International Studies Association,* International Studies Association

Child Soldiers International. (2008). *Global Report 2008.* Retrieved at http://www.child-soldiers.org/global_report_reader.php?id=97

Cline, L. (2013). *The Lord's Resistance Army.* Santa Barbara, CA :. ABC-CLIO. Retrieved from http://www.abc-clio.com/ABC-CLIOCorporate/product.aspx?pc=A3998C

Dallaire, R. (2011). *They fight like soldiers, they die like children.* New York: Random House.

Danish Refugee Council & Danish Demining Group. (2013). *Armed violence and stabilization in Western Equatoria: Recovering from the Lord's Resistance Army.* Retrieved from http://drc.dk/fileadmin/uploads/pdf/IA_PDF/South_Sudan/South_Sudan_AV_and_Stabilisation_in_WE.pdf

Dunn, K. C. (2004). Uganda: The Lord's Resistance Army. *Review of African Political Economy,* 139-142. Retrieved at http://www.jstor.org/stable/4006946?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

Human Rights Watch. (2009, January 17). *DR Congo: LRA slaughters 620 in 'Christmas Massacres.'* Retrieved from http://www.hrw.org/news/2009/01/17/dr-congo-lra-slaughters-620-christmas-massacres

Human Rights Watch. (2010, March 28). *DR Congo: Lord's Resistance Army rampage kills 321.* Retrieved from https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/03/28/dr-congo-lords-resistance-army-rampage-kills-321

Human Rights Watch. (2012, March 21). *Q&A on Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army.* Retrieved from http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/03/21/qa-joseph-kony-and-lords-resistance-army

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. (2013). *LRA-related displacement in central Africa: An end to the emergency, but not to IDPs' needs.* Retrieved from http://www.internal-displacement.org/sub-saharan-africa/lra-related-displacement-in-central-africa-an-end-to-the-emergency-but-not-to-idps-needs-/

Kelly, J. (2010). *Rape in war: Motives of militia in DRC.* United States Institute of Peace.

Kelly, J., & Branham, L. (2013). *"We suffer from war and more war": An assessment of the impact of the Lord's Resistance Army on formerly abducted children and their communities in northeastern Democratic Republic of the Congo."* Retrieved from http://hhi.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/publications/we-suffer-from-war-and-more-war.pdf

Kramer, S. (2012). Forced marriage and the absence of gang rape: Explaining sexual violence by the Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda. *The Journal of Politics and Society, 23*(1), 11-49.

Lancaster, P., Lacaille, G., & Cakaj, L. (2011). *Diagnostic study of the Lord's Resistance Army.* Washington, DC: World Bank. Retrieved at http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2011/06/16187123/diagnostic-study-lords-resistance-army

Resolve (The) and Invisible Children. (2014). *LRA Crisis Tracker: Tracking Joseph Kony: A rebel leader's nine-year odyssey.* Retrieved at http://reports.lracrisistracker.com/en/tracking-kony/

Resolve (The). (2010). *Basic History.* Retrieved from http://www.theresolve.org/the-lra-crisis/basic-history/

Ronan, P. (2015). *LRA Crisis Tracker: The State of the LRA in 2015.* The Resolve and Invisible Children. Retrieved from http://reports.lracrisistracker.com/en/state-of-the-lra-2015/

Ronan, P. & Poffenberger, M. (2013). *Hidden in plain sight: Sudan's harboring of the LRA in the Kafia Kingi enclave, 2009-2013.* The Resolve. Washington, DC. Retrieved from https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/theresolve/HIDDEN+IN+PLAIN+SIGHT+-+[FINAL+V].pdf

Schomerus, M. (2007). *The Lord's Resistance Army in Sudan: A history and overview.* Geneva: Small Arms Survey. Retrieved from http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/fileadmin/docs/working-papers/HSBA-WP-08-LRA.pdf

Schomerus, M., & Tumutegyereize, K. (2009). After Operation Lightning Thunder: Protecting communities and building peace. *Conciliation Resources*. Retrieved at http://www.c-r.org/sites/default/files/AfterOperationLightningThunder_200904_ENG.pdf

Schomerus, M. (2012). "They forget what they came for": Uganda's army in Sudan. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 6(1), 124-153. Retrieved at http://www.tandfonline. com/doi/pdf/10.1080/17531055.2012.664707

Shepler, S. A. (2005). *Conflicted childhoods: Fighting over child soldiers in Sierra Leone* (Doctoral dissertation). University of California, Berkeley.

Singer, P. W. (2005). *Children at War.* New York: Pantheon Books.

United Nations Department of Political Affairs website. (Fall 2012). *UN and partners build momentum in the fight against the LRA*. Retrieved from http://www.un.org/wcm/web-dav/site/undpa/shared/undpa/pdf/Politically%20Speaking%20Fall%202012.pdf

United Nations Security Council. (2013, May 20). *Report of the Secretary-General on the Activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and on the Lord's Resistance Army-affected areas.* Retrieved from http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2013_297.pdf

U.S. Department of State. (2012, March 23). *The Lord's Resistance Army.* Retrieved at http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/03/186734.htm

Van Acker, F. (2004). Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army: The new order no one ordered. *African Affairs,* 103(412), 335–357. doi:10.1093/afraf/adh044

Wlodarczyk, N. M. (2004). *Witchcraft, war and rationality: The strategic functions of traditional religion in contemporary African conflict* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Montreal, Quebec, Canada Retrieved from http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p73688_index.html

Appendix

About the Study Team

About the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative

The Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) is a university-wide academic and research center at Harvard University that brings an interdisciplinary approach to promoting understanding of humanitarian crisis as a unique contributor to global health problems and to developing evidence-based approaches to humanitarian assistance.

About the Women in War Program

The Harvard Humanitarian Initiative's (HHI) Women in War program seeks to investigate and address women's needs in today's most troubled settings. HHI's network of diverse faculty, fellows and researchers examines pressing issues that impact women's security throughout the world. Our projects emphasize the unique vulnerabilities women face in humanitarian settings, including gender-based violence, other forms of exploitation and abuse, and economic insecurity. Our research identifies some of the consequences of social instability and violence on women's livelihoods as well as the key role women can have as agents of social change. Our work highlights the ways in which women are vital actors in their communities—advocates for change, business people, service providers and leaders. HHI's research attempts to capture the complexities and nuances of these roles and to explore how women interact with other actors.

HHI's investigations inform approaches to reduce the vulnerability of women in conflict and support community-level resilience strategies. The Women in War program employs a participatory research approach grounded in collaborations with international and local non-governmental organizations and community-based associations. This approach helps us bring the voices of the experts—the women affected by violence and instability—to practitioners and policymakers to catalyze the development of more effective programming. The program's goal is to translate the knowledge gained from working with affected communities into timely and impactful programming and policy.

Table 5. Study Participants and Activities: Uganda

Code	Methodology	Location	Participants			
			Number	Age (Years)	Gender	Role
U01	Focus Group Discussion (FGD)	Lela Chu, Agogo District	12	>18	F	Former Abductees
U02	FGD	Lela Chu, Agogo District	9	>18	M	Former Abductees
U03	FGD	Wol, Agogo District	12	40-70	M	Community Leaders
U04	FGD	Atut Arwenye, Wol, Agogo	10	>18	F	General Community Members
U05	FGD	Atut Arwenye, Wol, Agogo	11	>18	M	Former Abductees and Combatants
U06	FGD	Soloti Village, Paimol, Agogo	10	>18	M/F	Ex-Combatants
U07	FGD	Aloi, Paimol, Agogo	12	>18	F	General Community Members
U08	FGD	Paimol, Agogo	11	>18	M	Community Leaders
U09	FGD	Aloi, Paimol, Agogo	13	>18	M/F	Community Leaders
U10	FGD	Aloi, Paimol, Agogo	9	>18	M/F	Ex-Combatants
U11	FGD	Aloi, Paimol, Agogo	11	>18	F	Former Abductees/ General Community Members
U12	FGD	Kitgum District	12	>18	M/F	Ex-Combatants
U13	FGD	Kitgum District	13	>18	M/F	Ex-Combatants
U14	Key Informant Interview (KII)	Gulu Town, Gulu District	1	37	M	Ex-Combatant - Lieutenant Colonel
U15	KII	Gulu Town, Gulu District	1	23	M	Ex-Combatant
U16	KII	Gulu Town, Gulu District	1	35	M	Ex-Combatant - Lieutenant (2 stars)
U17	KII	Gulu Town, Gulu District	1	22	M	Ex-Combatant
U18	KII	Gulu Town, Gulu District	1	24	M	Ex-Combatant - Corporal
U19	KII	Gulu Town, Gulu District	1	28	M	Ex-Combatant - Sergeant
U20	Informal interview	Gulu Town, Gulu District	2	Not known	F	Former Abductees

Table 6. Study Participants and Activities: Central African Republic

Code	Methodology	Location	Participants			
			Number	Age (Years)	Gender	Role
C01	KII	Obo	1	39	F	Community Leader
C02	KII	Obo	1	44	M	Community Leader
C03	KII	Obo	1	41	M	Community Leader
C04	KII	Obo	1	38	M	Community Leader
C05	KII	Obo	1	42	M	Former Abductee
C06	KII	Obo	1	50	F	Former Abductee
C07	FGD	Obo	9	28-55	M	Hunters
C08	FGD	Obo	2	22, 42	M	Local Defense Unit (LDU) Leaders
C09	CM	Obo	11	28-55	M	Hunters/ Motorbike Drivers

Table 7. Study Participants and Activities: South Sudan

Code	Methodology	Location	Participants			
			Number	Age (Years)	Gender	Role
S01	KII	Yambio County	1	45-55	M	NGO Staff
S02	KII	Yambio County	1	45-55	M	Community Leader
S03	FGD	Gangura Payam, Yambio County	13	18-35	F	Community Members/ Former Abductees
S04	FGD	Gangura Payam, Yambio County	12	18-32	M	Community Members
S05	FGD	Gangura Payam, Yambio County	12	45-70	M	Community Leaders
S06	FGD	Gangura Payam, Yambio County	9	18-30	M	LDU Members
S07	FGD	Sakure Payam, Nzara County	8	18-39	M	LDU Members
S08	FGD	Sakure Payam, Nzara County	11	18-60	F	Community Members/ Former Abductees
S09	FGD	Sakure Payam, Nzara County	8	40-60	M	Community Leaders
S10	KII	Sakure Payam, Nzara County	1	>18	F	Former Abductee
S11	FGD	Basikimbi Payam, Nzara County	11	40+	M	Community Leaders
S12	FGD	Basikimbi Payam, Nzara County	12	18-35	M	Arrow Boys
S13	FGD	Basikimbi Payam, Nzara County	10	18-35	F/M	Former Abductees / Families of Abductees
S14	FGD	Basikimbi Payam, Nzara County	12	18-35	F	Community Members
S15	FGD	Source Yubo Payam, Tambura County	8	18-35	M	LDU Members
S16	FGD	Andari Payam, Ezo County	10	18-30	M	LDU Members
S17	FGD	Andari Payam, Ezo County	11	18-30	F/M	Former Abductees
	Conceptual Mapping (CM)	Source Yubo Payam, Tambura County	4	18-39	M	LDU Members
	CM	Source Yubo Payam, Tambura County	4	18-30	F	Former Abductees
	CM	Andari Payam, Ezo County	4	18-30	F/M	LDU Members
	CM	Andari Payam, Ezo County	4	18-30	F	Former Abductees
	CM	Gangura Payam, Yambio County	4	18-30	M	LDU Members
	CM	Gangura Payam, Yambio County	4	18-30	F	Former Abductees

Table 8. Study Participants and Activities: Democratic Republic of the Congo

Code	Methodology	Location	Participants			
			Number	Age (Years)	Gender	Role
D01	FGD	Dungu	2	>18	M	Community Leaders
D02	FGD	Dungu	6	30-59	M/F	Community Leaders
D03	KII	Dungu	1	17	M	Former Abductee
D04	KII	Dungu	1	19	M	Former Abductee
D05	KII	Dungu	1	47	F	Former Abductee
D06	KII	Dungu	1	50	F	Former Abductee
D07	KII	Dungu	1	56	F	Former Abductee
D08	KII	Dungu	1	70	F	Former Abductee
D09	KII	Dungu	1	20	F	Former Abductee
D10	FGD	Dungu	6	>18	M	Community Members

Photo Credits

Cover : Marcus Bleasdale / Page 6: Marcus Bleasdale / Page 10: Jocelyn Kelly / Page 12: Marcus Bleasdale / Page 19: Marcus Bleasdale / Page 32: Marcus Bleasdale

Report Design

Report design and illustrations by Maren Wickwire - Manifest Media / www.manifestmedia.de

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

SOUTH SUDAN

UGANDA

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO