

Wartime Captivity and Homecoming: Culture, Stigma and Coping Strategies of Formerly Abducted Women in Post- conflict Northern Uganda

Kiconco, A. & Nthakomwa

Published PDF deposited in Coventry University's Repository

Original citation:

Kiconco, A & Nthakomwa, M 2021, 'Wartime Captivity and Homecoming: Culture, Stigma and Coping Strategies of Formerly Abducted Women in Post-conflict Northern Uganda', *Disasters*, vol. (In Press), pp. (In Press).

<https://doi.org/10.1111/disa.12505>

DOI 10.1111/disa.12505

ISSN 0361-3666

ESSN 1467-7717

Publisher: Wiley

© 2021 The Authors. Disasters published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd on behalf of Overseas Development Institute. This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Wartime captivity and homecoming: culture, stigma, and coping strategies of formerly abducted women in post-conflict northern Uganda

Allen Kiconco PhD Candidate, Department of African Studies and Anthropology, University of Birmingham, United Kingdom, and **Martin Nthakomwa** Lecturer in International Disaster Relief and Community Reconstruction, Faculty of Engineering, Environment and Computing, Coventry University, United Kingdom

One of the three durable solutions to mass displacement preferred by leading agencies is that survivors return to their home communities. It is believed that families and communities provide the best hope for recovery and reintegration owing to familiarity, care, and shared culture. Yet, these 'places of hope and comfort' can also be, potentially, a hostile environment in which stigma can flourish. Women who were abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda find that achieving meaningful reintegration into their communities is a distant prospect despite being the home culture they once shared. The stigmatisation of formerly abducted persons by home community members who have never been abducted renders them 'outsiders' upon return. Meaningful relationships with fellow community members and access to cultural, social, and economic systems are hampered by the women's traumatic past. This experience has significant implications for these women, negotiating their journey to recovery and reintegration into home communities.

Keywords: Acholi, conflict, gender, girls, Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), recovery, reintegration, stigma, Uganda

Introduction

Reintegration constitutes one of the three durable solutions for displaced people (UNHCR, 2011). Post-disaster recovery, of which reintegration is a part, underlines the importance of reuniting families and communities. For formerly abducted persons, 'the family and community provide the most effective protection' (Paris Principle, 2007, p. 23). However, homecoming to post-conflict northern Ugandan communities has been characterised by social stigmatisation by 'never-abducted' populations.

Furthermore, through the prism of culture, traditions, and beliefs, never-abducted people struggle to engage constructively with formerly abducted persons, impacting on their reintegration. In fact, stigmatisation by the majority of the never-abducted has become one of the main obstacles to the meaningful recovery and reintegration of the formerly abducted. For this reason, the latter are compelled by their circumstances to seek new or even alternative strategies for coping with or negotiating the process of recovery and reintegration.

This paper focuses on formerly abducted women and their lived experiences in the Acholi sub-region of northern Uganda. Upon homecoming, they are confronted with the stigma associated with them having previously lived within the masculine militaristic culture of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

The violent history of recruitment into the LRA and their time in the bush challenge numerous social, cultural, and spiritual norms in Acholi. Communities view formerly abducted women as having violated traditional norms, and therefore they are perceived as sexually impure, spiritually tainted, and a threat to the patriarchal order. Following their return to their home region of Acholi, they are regarded as having lower social status, suggesting that abduction, their experience of being part of the rebellion, their stay in the bush, and the sexual violence have positioned them outside of social harmony (Porter, 2017). The women suffer stigma and exclusion from community life because they are considered as lacking personal and feminine qualities of purity, innocence, peacefulness, and obedience.

This paper examines stigma as a significant mediator between formerly abducted women and their reintegration into communities of northern Uganda. It argues that the time spent with the LRA does not help with smooth reintegration due to problematic associations drawn between the history of the group and the women's new identity as formerly abducted persons. Three related factors contribute to the stigma and marginalisation: being women; being formerly abducted; and being carriers of polluting spirits. Specifically, the paper links the stigma experienced by the formerly abducted women with local social, cultural, and spiritual beliefs and practices, which must be overcome for reintegration to be successful. Thus, this paper also analyses the extent of the stigma directed towards them and evaluates the strategies pursued to cope with it to facilitate their post-war life, recovery, and reintegration.

The paper is organised as follows. A brief contextual background to the LRA insurgency in northern Uganda is presented first, followed by a discussion relating to the research methodology adopted. This leads to an exploration of and discussion about Acholi traditional practices, spiritual and cultural beliefs, and their impact on formerly abducted women's homecoming and subsequent reintegration. With a particular focus on stigma and perspectives in Acholi society, the paper connects the stigma experienced by formerly abducted women with local spiritual and cultural beliefs and practices and demonstrates further how stigmatisation hinders recovery and reintegration. It concludes with a discussion of strategies for coping with stigma and engaging in reintegration.

To appreciate the context within which this discussion is situated, it is important at this point to chart the events and the situation leading to the abduction of girls (along with boys, women, and men) from their communities into the LRA militia.

The LRA insurgency in northern Uganda

Researchers have approached analysis of the LRA from a range of perspectives, with varying foci and points of emphasis. The narratives identify Joseph Kony, a soldier and

self-proclaimed spiritual leader, from the Odek community of the Acholi sub-region, and the forces of the Government of Uganda as the main opposing entities (see, for example, Dolan, 2009; Branch, 2011). Starting as a relatively unknown figure, Kony gained notoriety from around 1987 after kidnapping and forcibly recruiting child combatants into his army (Annan, Blattman, and Horton, 2006; Pham, Vinck, and Stover, 2007; Annan et al., 2008; Blattman and Annan, 2010).

The conflict in northern Uganda can be traced to the overthrow of Ugandan President Tito Okello (an Acholi) by Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Army (NRA) in 1986. In the early years of the LRA, as well as those of its predecessor militia organisation (the Holy Spirit Movement) led by the local prophetess Alice Auma ('Lakwena'), the organisation commanded some considerable local support (Behrend, 1999). This was attributed firstly to traditions among the locals, secondly to the overthrow of Okello by the NRA, and thirdly to atrocities committed against Acholi people associated with the formerly rebel NRA that had just assumed power (renamed the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) in 1995). During the early stages, significant numbers of LRA members were Ugandan government soldiers ousted following Okello's demise.

Although the LRA initially enjoyed significant local support, this waned over time as the conflict continued (Branch, 2011). However, with support from the Government of Sudan, which shared a common enemy in the new Government of Uganda under Museveni, the LRA rapidly grew into a formidable guerrilla force (Prunier, 2004). Starting in the Acholi sub-region, the conflict had widespread adverse effects on almost all sub-regions of northern Uganda. The group increasingly engaged in forced abductions and the recruitment of young boys and girls (Pham, Vinck, and Stover, 2007).

Following a period of insurgency and counterinsurgency, the Government of Uganda attempted to engage with the LRA through the peace talks led by Betty Bigombe (1994–95). Alongside these efforts, the Governments of Sudan and Uganda also engaged in a peace drive through the Nairobi Agreement (1999). When these endeavours showed signs of stalling or failing, though, the Government of Uganda launched, in March 2002, Operation Iron Fist. To prevent Kony from enjoying relatively easy access to support/supplies from Sudan, it invaded LRA military hideouts near the border with Sudan to cut off supplies (Branch, 2011).

The UPDF resolved to counteract the forced recruitment of children as LRA combatants by forcibly moving people into internally displaced person (IDP) camps in northern Uganda. The government argued that the move would also protect the public from LRA attacks. Subsequently, more than 500,000 civilians were soon provided with shelter in IDP camps. By 2001, approximately 1.7 million civilians had been forced by the government to relocate to them (Dolan, 2009). The camps thus catered for two groups of people: the majority who had been moved by the government forcibly from communities in northern Uganda; and those who had either escaped, been rescued, or had been freed from LRA captivity.

In July 2006, the then Vice President of South Sudan, Riek Machar, made further efforts to broker peace between the LRA and the Government of Uganda, but these

attempts also failed. The LRA then retreated and relocated itself in the vast bushy region stretching between Uganda, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and the Central African Republic. As a result, a period of relative peace followed, resulting in IDPs moving from the camps back to their communities in northern Uganda. The never-abducted populations—that is people who, as stated above, had been moved from communities to IDP camps by government forces—were later joined by children who had been abducted as combatants by the LRA. It is this second group—the formerly abducted children (now young adults) who have returned to reintegrate into the never-abducted population (home communities)—that is critical to this research. The focus is on formerly abducted girls, now women, and their lived experiences in the post-conflict Acholi sub-region.

Early research suggested that by the end of the war in 2006, most formerly abducted persons had returned to their communities and had successfully been reintegrated (see, for example, Annan et al., 2008). However, longer-term analyses indicate that experiences were very different, notably the significant reintegration problems owing to ostracism (see, for example, Mukasa, 2017; Van Leeuwen et al., 2018; Acan et al., 2019; Macdonald and Kerali, 2020). Abductees used compliance/obedience, stoicism, and silence to survive life in the LRA (Amony, 2015; Baines, 2017; Acan, 2017; Kiconco, 2021). As this paper shows, they are again experiencing exclusion and are relying on similar strategies to support them in their post-LRA daily life.

The discussion next assesses the extent of the stigma *faced by and directed towards* formerly abducted women, and how this manifests itself within the home cultural setting to which the women have returned to live. To do so, the paper identifies and evaluates the strategies that they have pursued to cope with stigma and explores their inner resolve to assist them with their recovery and reintegration. Hence, the stigmatisation of these women by home communities as they attempted to reintegrate, the drive to maintain social harmony within Acholi culture, and the strategies invoked to engage in reintegration are of particular interest to this research. But first, we need to highlight the research methodology adopted in the study.

Research methodology

Allen Kiconco carried out six months of ethnographic research in northern Uganda in 2012–13, particularly in the Acholi sub-region.¹ Interviews and conversations were held with 170 participants in Gulu, Kitgum, Lamwo, and Pader Districts. Of these, in-depth interviews were conducted with 57 formerly abducted women. Some were identified and recruited through rehabilitation centres, whereas others were found through snowball sampling of women interviewed previously.

Engaging the Acholi community was also critical for this project. Twelve focus-group discussions (FGDs) were organised with community members and women (formerly abducted and never-abducted). Numerous other key informants, including rehabilitation centre staff, local government officers, and local women leaders, were also interviewed.

The opportunity to undertake FGDs and interviews with key informants helped us to develop a deeper appreciation of how people in the Acholi sub-region made sense of and attributed meaning to war and its aftermath, and how this is reflected in the attitudes towards formally abducted persons, women in particular. This paper discusses some of the research findings that centre specifically on experience of stigmatisation and coping mechanisms.

The study generated a considerable amount of data from responses and accounts; a qualitative thematic content analysis approach was pursued for the purpose of analysis. The Nvivo 10 software package was used to organise, manage, and analyse the data. The analysis process initially involved familiarisation with the data by repeatedly reading interview scripts, comparing with field observations, and making notes on potential themes, patterns, and categories. Next, all of the transcribed interviews were transported from Microsoft Word to Nvivo 10 to organise, manage, and bring order to the data. This move facilitated inductive thematic/focused coding and analysis (Creswell, 2013). The theme of stigmatisation emerged as a significant integration problem. The final analysis focused on finding the meaning behind this response to help understand the situation of the research participants. We draw on interviewees' perspectives to provide evidence for the argument, using quotations to illustrate the broader set of life stories. Most of the interviewees gave expressed permission to use their correct details in data dissemination. But to protect their identities, we have anonymised all names and places.

The problem of reintegration

Disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) programmes in northern Uganda were guided by the *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards* (IDDRS), which defines reintegration as:

the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open time-frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and national responsibility and often necessitates long-term external assistance (UN, 2006, Module 1.10, p. 2).

This approach, though, has been criticised for being paternalistic, viewing ex-combatants and formerly abducted persons as the 'problem in need of reintegration' (Metsola, 2006, p. 119), rather than there being problems with the reintegration programmes themselves (see, for example, Bowd and Özerdem, 2013). The approach depicts this population and host communities as passive beneficiaries of reintegration programmes, such as education and skills training. In many programmes, local perspectives are missing. Once these programmes come to an end, interest in this population and their communities tends to be lost. Yet, experience shows that reintegration is broader and more prolonged than the life span of project activities, and

in many cases, occurs independently after programmes finish (see, for example, Nussio, 2012; Anderson, 2018; Vastapuu, 2018; Acan et al., 2019; Kiconco, 2021).

Our interviews show that reintegration follows several trajectories, including social, economic, political, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of adjustment. Indeed, our findings support Torjesen (2013, p. 2) who asserts that research efforts should concentrate on fostering an ‘understanding of reintegration where many causal factors are assessed, including how particular combinations of factors may account for why and how the process of reintegration has unfolded in the way that it has for different groups of combatants’. While we found that it may be helpful to rely on reintegration programmes as a point of departure in defining and analysing formerly abducted women’s reintegration in northern Uganda, the approach directs attention away from larger and long-term social, economic, cultural, and spiritual processes, moving towards a narrow and short-term set of activities. Furthermore, it fails to address many of the themes that surface when following their reintegration trajectories. We have applied a ‘bottom-up’ analytical framework here, therefore, that focuses less on project activities and instead places women’s experiences at the forefront of reintegration analysis.

Reintegration in this paper thus refers to the process formerly abducted women use to transition from combatant to civilian. It is dynamic, transformative, and aims to reconnect the individual with the community’s structural and cognitive elements, facilitate the re-establishment of familial/kinship ties, and regenerate community networks. We analyse reintegration as a long-term and dynamic process, which involves complex negotiations and exchanges between hosting communities and formerly abducted women. Inclusion is the ultimate goal of reintegration. This approach is applied because it spotlights the processes, experiences, and challenges formerly abducted women have encountered as they reintegrate into post-war communities in northern Uganda.

Acholi social and cultural problems viewed through a spiritual lens

To appreciate fully the paradox of stigma in Acholi, one needs to understand the profound value and need attached to maintaining social harmony within its culture (Porter, 2017) and the independent construct of ‘self’ (see p’Bitek, 1986; Finnstrom, 2008; Oloya, 2013).² In Acholi culture, a person is deeply rooted in their *kaka* (clan) and *caro* (village/community), and his/her good health, happiness, and spiritual welfare are based on harmony between the individual and their *kaka* and *caro*, with ancestral *jogi* (spirits) guiding the maintenance of this social harmony (Porter, 2017). The Liu Institute for Global Issues and Gulu District NGO Forum (2005, p. 11) found that ‘historically, the good health and happiness of the Acholi individual was always situated in the context of the harmony and wellbeing of the clan. The ancestral and spiritual worlds provided guidance to the Acholi people, maintaining the unity of the clan’.

Hence, according to Acholi society, social harmony ‘denotes a state of normal relations among the living and the dead, linked to an idea of cosmological equilibrium and a social balance of power and moral order’ (Porter, 2013, p. 15). This experience suggests that ‘social harmony is the highest goal of the Acholi community’ (Ofumbi, 2012, p. 116).

To uphold social harmony, therefore, people are discouraged from engaging in acts of *kiir*, ‘taboo/abomination’, that transgress society’s moral order (Justice and Reconciliation Project, 2007; Victor and Porter, 2017). The Justice and Reconciliation Project (2007, p. 4) found that, among other abominations, *kiir* includes:

the burning and destruction of property, the breaking of vows, fighting at the well or other sources of water, fighting in the garden, having sex in the bush, rape, incest, murder, walking over corpses, mishandling corpses (or neglecting to give the deceased a proper burial), throwing food, money or faeces in anger, beating one’s genitals, domestic quarrels between husbands and wives, defecating in food, and eating ash.

It is a local belief that failing to observe these moral codes compromises and transgresses social harmony, which angers the ancestral *jogi* and leads them to visit retribution on the individual, their *kaka* and *caro*. Bernstein (2009, p. 20) pointed out that ‘social suffering is a result of the deliberate attempt to disrespect Acholi culture, values and spirituality’. The Liu Institute for Global Issues and Gulu District NGO Forum (2005, p. 11) further note that:

conflicts, misfortune and poor health could be ‘sent’ by angry spirits and extended not only to the violators of the moral codes but to his or her family or clan. Thus, one person’s actions always had ramifications for his or her family and clan who in turn assumed collective responsibility for the offence.

In addition to failing to observe moral codes, which transgresses social harmony and leads to misfortune, a person’s well-being can also be jeopardised indirectly through possession by foreign spirits. Retribution of the spirit worlds, ancestral or foreign, manifests in the form of misfortune or illness. The most familiar type is caused by *cen*, ‘vengeance ghost or angry spirit’ (p’Bitek, 1986)—we return to the phenomenon of *cen* later in the paper.

An individual in Acholi society should thus live life adhering to the achievement of social harmony. However, we found that following the LRA insurgency and the return of formerly abducted persons, social harmony became ‘difficult to achieve and even harder to maintain’ (Porter, 2013, p. 15). Because of its operations, namely, killing, destroying villages, abductions, and residing in the bush, communities viewed the LRA group as disrupting social harmony. And because of their abduction and stay in the bush, the community believed that formerly abducted persons have also transgressed social harmony. Consequently, they are seen as ‘wrongdoers’, ‘outsiders’, and a ‘threat’ to never-abducted people and their well-being. Indeed, as their existence is thought to attract and cause serious misfortunes in society, there is a great need

to restore and protect social harmony. To be free from the retribution of the spirit world, many women who participated in our research thus experienced cultural cleansing in their communities upon homecoming.³ These experiences suggest that the principle of social harmony in Acholi has been compromised and distorted by the effects of war.

A formerly abducted woman reported that when she returned to her community, ‘people looked at me suspiciously and made remarks such as “you were part of the LRA that has been troubling people. You are not welcome into this same community that you people [rebels] have killed people and brought destruction”’. Another interviewee said: ‘I have no problems with my immediate neighbours, but people outside our backyard are the ones who say bad things [stigmatisation] to me. They still call me a *dwog cen paco*’. Sigma and stigmatisation descriptions followed similar patterns in the interviews.

Several terms exist that describe people who returned from the LRA in northern Uganda. The Amnesty Act of 2000 refers to amnesty beneficiaries in Uganda as ‘reporters’—as opposed to ex-soldiers—since many of those seeking amnesty could have joined armed groups involuntarily, as was the case with the LRA. The Act sees them, therefore, as reporting back home from involuntary military recruitment. While ‘reporter’ was the official—state/DDR—narrative in northern Uganda, communities in Acholi coined the term *dwog cen paco*, meaning ‘a former rebel who returned home’ or simply ‘a returnee’. It was derived from the phrase ‘come back home’, which was used to persuade LRA people to denounce the rebellion. Indeed, there was a radio programme in Gulu town, known as *Dwog Cen Paco* hosted by Radio Mega FM. However, several years after the end of the war, the description now carries stigma and has negative connotations in communities, rather than urging people to return home from the rebellion. We sensed during the fieldwork that a significant section of society continues to stigmatise formerly abducted persons, observing that locals had readopted a *dwog cen paco* term to mean ‘a former rebel’. The interviews reveal that several years after the war concluded, people still use *dwog cen paco* to describe a formerly abducted person, demonstrating the continued potency of stigmatisation.

Stigmatisation and discrimination of formerly abducted persons show that the people of northern Uganda have not forgotten the wrongs that LRA combatants (and their abductees) did to them and their communities. Although claims of forgiveness are commonplace in the Acholi sub-region, formerly abducted persons remain a constant reminder of those ‘wrongs’, and community members target them, leading to feelings of guilt, frustration, and confusion. As formerly abducted persons are deemed to be ‘polluted’ and ‘no longer normal’, they are stigmatised and discriminated against within their home communities. We set out to discover, therefore, the extent of the stigma *faced by and directed at* formerly abducted women and how this has manifested within a cultural setting (in which the women have returned to live), as well as to identify and evaluate the strategies they pursue to cope with stigma and aid their recovery and reintegration.

The Paris Principles (UNICEF, 2007, p. 32) observe that stigmatisation of formerly abducted girls ‘is one of greatest barriers to reintegration’, adding that the ‘stigma facing [them] is fundamentally different in kind—it lasts much longer, is critically more difficult to reduce and is more severe’ (UNICEF, 2007, p. 36). Although stigmatisation has previously been highlighted as a major obstacle to long-term social reintegration in northern Uganda (see, for example, Ndossi, 2010; Macdonald and Kerali, 2020), the root cause of its persistence has not been fully explored. Besides, the reintegration literature often uses the word ‘stigma’ without being precise about its meaning.

Our findings concur with the literature that formerly abducted women face persistent social stigma and discrimination in northern Uganda at many levels, by their own family and community members. However, we illustrate, using the Acholi case, how stigma materialises in their daily lives. This paper shows how widespread stigmatisation hinders efforts and the capacity to reintegrate and participate proactively in community activities and ultimately impacts on these women’s complete post-captivity recovery and inclusion. We discuss how claims of forgiveness by communities and subsequent cleansing rituals in the immediate aftermath of their return have not resulted in any realistic hope for formerly abducted women, as stigma prevails. Even when their own family members have fully accepted them, stigma within wider Acholi society persists.

Stigma and perspectives

The interviews revealed that stigmatisation was one of the major problems encountered by our research participants when they first returned home. More than 80 per cent of formerly abducted women reported still facing stigmatisation within their families and communities at the time of the interviews. The study subjects described stigmatisation by communities in terms of ‘hate-filled talks, insults and treatment’. According to Dijkster and Koomen (2007, p. 6), stigmatisation is:

the process by which an individual’s or group’s character or identity is negatively responded to on the basis of the individual’s or group’s association with a past, imagined, or currently present deviant condition, often with harmful physical or psychological consequences for the individual or group.

When ‘stigmatisation’ is used in this paper, therefore, it means stigma promotion, including any off-putting thoughts, inappropriate language, or actions intended to defame or slander formerly abducted persons.

Stigmatisation in this sense targets formerly abducted women because they are perceived as coming from a contaminated background.⁴ Abduction history not only stands in the way of their complete reintegration as ‘normal’ Acholi persons, but also this past has become the basis for stigmatisation by the majority of Acholi society, not personally abducted by the LRA. Thus, the reference to formerly abducted persons involves inappropriate stigma-promoting language, including ‘rebel’, ‘bush behaviour’,

‘bush mentality’, and/or ‘vengeance spirit possessed’. This language is demeaning, discriminatory, and shapes responses and attitudes to reintegration, sometimes sub-consciously, but adversely affecting an individual’s life opportunities.

Although several formerly abducted persons have returned home to their families (parents) to seek protection, stigma by sections of the home community has made life unbearable. Abducted in 1990, at the age of 14, for 14 years, Akello encapsulated the experiences and how it feels to be a formerly abducted woman in these words:

I feel and live like a stranger in my community. Life at home has become an entirely new thing. . . . I regard all this treatment [stigmatisation] as a serious insult because I never joined the LRA willingly. All this bad treatment [stigmatisation] makes me wonder why I returned home.

The interviewees used two geographical spaces, home and bush, to contrast their past and present experiences. During the fieldwork, we also observed a difference between understanding of the bush and home/community spaces in the context of Acholi. *Lum* refers to grass that expands into a bush. Hence, Acholi people use the concept of *Lum* to refer to the ‘bush’—denoting an unsafe, fearful, and mysterious place not to be visited without good reason. The bush is a place where wild animals, criminals, and polluting spirits reside. In contrast, home/community is a sanctioned space where people reside in harmony under the guidance of ancestral *jogi*.

Some studies utilise the the perspective of moral geography to explore this bush versus home binary in Acholi society (see, for example, Oloya, 2013; Dubal, 2018; Porter, 2019). Macdonald and Kerali (2020, pp. 11–12) state that:

On the one hand, it [bush] provides the firewood and game that sustain daily life in the village. But it is also a dangerous moral space. It is believed that journeys into the bush must be undertaken with care and vigilance because, in contraction to the home, in the village, the bush was not a place of human habitation and order, but a turbulent, ungovernable place where wild animals roamed free and formidable cosmological forces worked through and above nature.

At the beginning of the LRA rebellion, this tension between bush and home spaces became more pronounced. The LRA rebellion did not take place in a social and spiritual vacuum: it was largely an Acholi rebellion led by a majority of Acholi fighters. The leadership was no stranger to Acholi culture, therefore. However, Baines (2017) argues that in the late 1990s, Joseph Kony decided to create a ‘new Acholi nation’, which he considered to be morally superior to the old Acholi. According to her research participants, Kony termed the new state ‘Acholi A’ and the old state ‘Acholi B’. Besides abductions of adolescents and teenagers, Kony relied on institutionalised forced marriage to populate the new state (Amony, 2015; Apio, 2016; Baines, 2017; Kiconco, 2021). The new Acholi state project complemented the spiritual initiative project introduced at the formation of the group in the late 1980s (Behrend, 1999; Van Acker, 2004; Titeca, 2010). The LRA/new Acholi practised their version

of social harmony, just like home, upheld by a spiritual body via Kony (Behrend, 1999; Van Acker, 2004). While their settlements in South Sudan and social life mirrored old Acholi, the rebellion developed its own moral codes by which every member lived (Titeca, 2010; Baines, 2017; Porter, 2019; Kiconco, 2021). The interviews revealed that upon arrival at the LRA settlements, newly abducted persons were subjected to rituals with a view to cleansing them of any potential polluting spirits and witchcraft from old and inferior Acholi state (Kiconco, 2021). Transgressors of LRA/new Acholi social harmony were punished, sometimes by death (Titeca, 2010; Baines, 2017; Porter, 2019).

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

Furthermore, it is believed that formerly abducted persons are deemed not to be *fully* capable of complete cleansing, spiritually. Thus, the stigma arising from cultural and spiritual beliefs impinges on their life opportunities, as they are unable to establish reciprocal trust for effective social interactions, relationships, and marriages (Kiconco and Nthakomwa, 2018; Kiconco, 2021). As the interviews demonstrate, formerly abducted persons in northern Uganda face blanket resistance to their attempts to gain trust and reintegrate into their home communities. Humanitarian and development workers and researchers have perceived formerly abducted persons in northern Uganda, particularly women, as innocent victims. However, a significant section of the home community does not fully take into consideration the circumstances of their abduction and so their involvement with the LRA. The home community is thus unwilling to accept completely formerly abducted persons and to forgive to smoothen their path to reintegration. Locals perceive them to be dangerous and therefore feared. They are *feared* because they are from an ‘unknown’, ‘suspicious’, and ‘stained’ background. In addition, a significant number of people from the communities believe that formerly abducted persons are prone to repeating habits learned from their time with the militia.

From a related perspective, formerly abducted persons are not seen as *whole* individuals, but as individuals whose *being* is ‘stained’, ‘confused’, and ‘mentally unsound’. Aciro was abducted in 1999 at the age of 13 for six years. When she returned home, community members questioned her sanity. She recalled:

some people said because I had spent six long years in the bush, I could be mentally unstable. It did not go down so well with me because I knew I am mentally sound despite the bad things I had been forced to do while in the bush.

Stigmatisation and discrimination are widespread, and as such, participation in community events and projects is hampered. As our interviewees' experiences show, formerly abducted persons are seen as unfit to participate in community projects and occupy significant community positions. Another woman said:

The never abducted people think and look at us who have returned from the bush as senseless. For example, when electing leaders in community meetings, they do not think we have credible opinions. Instead, they think that when we are angered, we can turn against the people. This is the reason why they do not elect us into local leadership positions. Even if you raise your hand in such meetings, they will not point at you to be given the opportunity to speak, and as such you put down your hand and return home.

Throughout the fieldwork, it was apparent that people distrust formerly abducted persons, believing the bush and the LRA left them 'contaminated'. Taken collectively, irrespective of the length of abduction and experience, they are seen to possess 'bush mentality', that is, dangerous, unintelligent, offensive, intolerant, terrible, and uncivilised mindsets or behaviour. They are stigmatised because they are seen as having deviated from the home cultural norms of honesty, intelligence, purity, wholeness, and attractiveness. This kind of attitude is not unique to communities of northern Uganda: it has happened too in eastern DRC where formerly abducted persons are seen as possessing a 'military mentality/spirit' and easily angered or possessed by a demon (Tonheim, 2012; see also Coulter (2009) for analysis based in Sierra Leone).

The participants' stories suggest two parallel worlds of 'the bush' and 'normal people'. The women who participated in our research felt firmly confined to the 'bush' world by the community. Although they lived in close physical proximity to the 'normal'/never-abducted people, they were singled out as different and 'other'. Their experiences show that formerly abducted persons are deemed as of lower status when others know their history. As a consequence, many find themselves isolated from society and discredited by the unaccepting society. An examination of the issues within the Acholi sub-region makes apparent that three assumptions shape the community's negative perception of formerly abducted women: 'violation of traditional norms'; 'raped and therefore unhealthy and impure'; and 'potential carriers of *cen*'.

Violation of traditional norms

We found that there was a strong gendered element to stigmatisation in Acholi. While we got the impression that both formerly abducted women and men faced stigmatisation because of their past, the experience was particularly severe for women. Annan et al. (2011) found that formerly abducted women in northern Uganda were at least twice as likely to report persistent family and community problems, including stigma. We understood that some of this stigma is embedded in the tension between home and bush spaces highlighted earlier.

Further to the discussion above, women returning home with children fathered by LRA fighters are viewed as having violated traditional norms. An Acholi girl giving birth without being legally married runs contrary to Acholi traditional and cultural expectations, as this is perceived to be a threat to the institution of marriage. The local assumption is that the women were abducted as virgins and that rebels raped and impregnated them in the bush, a contested space. Accordingly, communities see these women and their children (born out of wedlock) as having violated the customary norms of gender, kinship, marriage, and patriarchy. Their presence is consequentially interpreted as disrupting and threatening the Acholi social order and harmony. Communities view these women through a lens of purity, innocence, moral intelligence, and experience. They are judged to have deviated from key personal and feminine qualities and are instead regarded as damaged women with low social status. The women can still contribute to their families and communities, but they are no longer regarded as carriers of the cherished values that Acholi women depend upon and by which they are defined: peacefulness; purity; and innocence. Formerly abducted women have transgressed into the realm of violence, which is an inherently masculine world. Their participation in it is regarded as a betrayal of social norms that consider women as non-violent and peaceful (Meintjes, Pillay, and Turshen, 2001). From the standpoint of the interviewees' experiences, this perception particularly affects formerly abducted women's attempts to relate to home communities, engage in livelihood recovery activities, or get married (Kiconco and Nthakomwa, 2018; Kiconco, 2021).

Raped and therefore unhealthy and impure

Research shows that rape continues to be an everyday experience in Acholi society (Porter, 2017). However, because the raping of formerly abducted women happened in 'the bush', the experience further complicated their position upon returning home. Communities fear formerly abducted women because they are perceived as carriers of cosmological consequences for the home space; it becomes imperative that they are instantly cleansed (Kiconco, 2021). They are also seen as possibly infected with HIV/AIDS (human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) and other sexually transmitted diseases. It is important to note that formerly abducted persons (women and men) are both referred to locally as *olum olum*. Of particular interest, though, is that while formerly abducted men are commonly referred to as 'Kony soldiers', women are described as 'Kony wives', which suggests victims of sexual violence, including rape and sexual slavery. This observation regarding the choice of terminology may seem to highlight negligible and subtle differences, but these gendered stereotypes have left formerly abducted women's identity severely compromised. Finnstrom (2008, p. 193) found that 'in a deeper sense, however, girls are also more often held to be impure sexually and thus morally more dubious, even more dangerous, than boys'.

Potential carriers of *cen*

Violation of customary norms and sexual impurity influence formerly abducted women's lived experiences post LRA. Yet, we understood that the tendency of the home community to link them to LRA killings fuels and sustains community discrimination and stigmatisation. Acholi culture suggests that their forced participation in killings during their captivity will have contaminated them with *cen* (vengeful spirit of the dead).⁵ The Liu Institute for Global Issues and Gulu District NGO Forum (2005, p. 12) found that *cen* is viewed as:

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

Cen is visible in an individual who participated in an unresolved murder or accidental death or has come across the body of someone killed violently. According to Acholi beliefs, the spirits of such dead people or huge wild animals will haunt the area to avenge the death, and so *cen* may possess an individual who passes through such an area (Liu Institute for Global Issues and Gulu District NGO Forum, 2005; Harlacher, 2009). Based on this belief, forests, woodlands, and the wilderness in war-affected northern Uganda and South Sudan are perceived to be places inhabited by wandering spirits of the dead. It is believed that roaming and residing in these areas transformed abductees into potential vehicles of *cen*.

It is difficult to determine how the impact of *cen* varies, but it seems the more *cen* one experiences, the greater its consequence. The latter manifests when the person deemed to have been exposed to *cen* starts behaving in what is considered to be a socially and morally disturbing way, before becoming violent and eventually lapsing into insanity (Finnström, 2008, p. 160). *Cen* is thought to be contagious and transferable to the second generation of the 'possessed'; for instance, a baby can be born with *cen* if either parent was possessed; or, if not exorcised or cleansed, *cen* may be transmitted down the lineage of a carrier (Liu Institute for Global Issues and Gulu District NGO Forum, 2005; Finnström, 2008). *Cen* not only targets someone's personality, but it also affects his or her social and economic well-being. We found some women in this study living close to their families, suggesting that family members did not see them as having contaminated them with *cen*. Although we did not document stories of banishment from communities, locals speculated that fear of *cen* follows formerly abducted persons.

Stigmatisation in this sense targets formerly abducted persons because they are perceived as having contracted the potentially deadly angry spirits and could unknowingly wreak havoc in their families and communities. Seen as potential carriers of a

‘vengeful spirit’, this translates into the belief that they should be avoided so that *cen* does not attack, kill, or transfer to the ‘normal’ individuals.

The responses suggest that culture is both a solution and a problem for formerly abducted persons in the Acholi sub-region. It can be argued that formerly abducted women need their community and culture to achieve successful reintegration (inclusion). Paradoxically, people’s resentment and ‘inflexible’ culture and traditions have been seen to hinder effective and meaningful reintegration into the home community. While there is general acceptance that the women were recruited against their will, stigmatisation persists, and they are seen by others as substandard and unworthy.

In summary, returning home means going back to patriarchal communities in the Acholi sub-region where men have the greatest power, leadership roles, privilege, moral authority, and access to resources, including in the family. The research participants were confronted with a culture and lifestyle that attach violence to masculinity. In their communities, they are viewed as having violated traditional gender norms, posing a threat to the patriarchal order. They are characterised as lacking personal and feminine qualities, stigmatised, and classified as having low social status. Notably, because of their past, these women are seen as damaged goods, unfit for consideration for marriage and motherhood (Apio, 2016; Kiconco, 2021). The stigma comes from a bad perception about what will have happened to the women in captivity. The unique feature here is that the stigma of this population transcends beyond them being victims of the LRA rebellion to being linked to undesirable characteristics from their time in captivity.

Stigmatisation as a hindrance to reintegration

As is evident from the interviewees’ experiences, formerly abducted persons feel a need to avoid engaging in community activities because of stigma and the resulting discrimination. Listening to negative responses repeatedly strains relationships with the never-abducted community, affecting their self-esteem and leading to perpetual unhappiness. Aware of the tendency of friends, families, and home communities to associate formerly abducted persons with the past, coupled with persistent slander or demeaning reactions, the experiences reinforce their belief that despite attempts to reintegrate, there are few prospects of achieving normal life and meaningful reintegration. Through personal and social experiences, formerly abducted persons are highly conscious of stigmatising labels such as ‘rebel’, ‘bush behaviour/mentality’, or ‘angry spirit possessed’, coupled with finger-pointing and accusations. Despite not being physically rejected and ejected for returning to their home communities, they know that their society has not fully accepted them. Thus, their participation in community life and activities geared to support reintegration is severely affected.

The interviews suggest that stigma promotion results in emotional distress by generating a sense of guilt that triggers helplessness, loneliness, and depression. As formerly abducted persons cannot protect themselves from stigma, this situation creates

further a sense of confusion. It is apparent from the interviews that stigma is destructive to their psychological recovery and reintegration. Stigmatisation reminds them of life in captivity about which they desperately want to forget. Consequently, these experiences within their communities have become hindrances to building confidence for effective reintegration.

Post-conflict reconstruction literature considers acceptance at the family and the community level to be an important factor in successful reintegration (McKay and Mazurana, 2004; Boothby, 2006; Annan et al., 2008; Betancourt et al., 2008; Anderson, 2018). The interviewees described complete acceptance as being free from stigmatisation, an indicator of successful social reintegration (inclusion). One woman remarked that when an individual 'no longer experiences any form of stigma, that person will confidently say, "I have successfully reintegrated". Don't circumstances and daily encounters, like rudeness, insulting and mocking her for no good reason, seem radically different from that which has the potential to facilitate her recovery and integration process?'. A social environment that provides the necessary preconditions for embarking on recovery and inclusion seems to be one where stigmatising factors are non-existent. A common feature of former abductees' experiences is that stigma rekindles traumatic memories of war and captivity.

Progressive reintegration was expected to ensure that the community of origin assisted with transitioning a formerly abducted person from military to civilian life, leading to community inclusion. Interestingly, comments from the community would seem to suggest differently. According to the participants in our FGDs with never-abducted community members, successful reintegration will happen only when formerly abducted persons stop paying much attention to their stigmatisation. The locals implied that formerly abducted persons would always be stigmatised, and their reactions to stigma would determine the speed at which their social reintegration took place. One participant in the FGDs concluded this argument with the following remark:

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

Surprisingly, locals said that a 'lack (end) of reaction by formerly abducted persons to daily abuse' by the wider community would be seen as a litmus test, meaning that they are finally ready to engage in meaningful reintegration. The statement suggests a one-way process whereby the formerly abducted must make efforts to reintegrate. It seems understandable, therefore, that one woman remarked: 'it was not our choice to be abducted. People behave as if they do not know that. The government should

sensitise people in communities so that they stop stigmatising us'. Hence, it seems imperative that home communities avoid promoting the stigma of formerly abducted persons. Currently, relationships with formerly abducted persons are characterised by caution and 'being on guard', as each side is unsure about the reactions of the other party.

Strategies for coping with stigma and engaging in reintegration

Against the backdrop of the cultural and stigmatising experiences discussed above, formerly abducted women have developed a range of strategies to cope and engage in the reintegration process. These are discussed below.

Information control

We observed that most formerly abducted persons live in rural communities where everyone knows their neighbours and backgrounds, and the stigma is perpetuated by the community's collective culture. In these settings, a person is not defined as an independent individual/self but in terms of social relations and the groups within which one functions, from family and clan to the broader community (see p'Bitek, 1986; Finnstrom, 2008; Oloya, 2013). This culture among the Acholi people means that formerly abducted persons are easily identifiable by neighbours. However, in these settings, some women in our study indicated that they cope with their predicament by controlling information. They strongly guard against sharing complete stories of their life in captivity with their acquaintances. A reflection on this suggests that we can attribute some of these behaviours to self-stigma: concern about being heavily stigmatised or simply an inability to respond to stigma promotion. One interviewee's comments are useful in articulating this point: 'based on my experiences within this community, I often bend my head down in shame when someone asks me about my bush experience . . . or every time I hear people talking about us [formerly abducted persons]'. This seems consistent with the finding of Annan, Brier, and Aryemo (2009, p. 650): 'when [formerly abducted persons] experienced problems with neighbours or other community members, most of them described reacting passively—staying silent or walking away'.

Urbanisation as a recovery and reintegration strategy

Further to the above, other unconventional strategies are also employed as coping strategies, including relocating to new environments, particularly urban centres, where formerly abducted persons are unlikely to be identified and stigmatised. Urban living was said to provide opportunities to conceal true identities safely, thus minimising the possibility of being discredited. As residents in urban areas tend to come from all over Uganda, in contrast, to close-knit communities characteristic of rural Acholi,

this environment provides some hope for recovery. Hence, ‘recovery by urbanising’ becomes a reintegration strategy for formerly abducted women. Urban lives enable them to move around freely, just like the freedom exercised by the never-abducted community members. At the time of the interviews, it was disclosed that Lamunu and her husband Okello (both formerly abducted) had left their communities and relocated to the outskirts of Gulu town, where their past is unknown. Because people do not know their true identities and their backgrounds, they are in a position to embark successfully on the process of recovery and personal healing. As Lamunu put it, ‘I like sitting where people are gathered. I hear many bad comments about us [former abductees] . . . it tells me that we are still stigmatised and discriminated’. It is clear from such examples that the collective life prevalent in Acholi culture, although a key source of security and protection for some, is unable to provide the solace and environment for meaningful recovery and reintegration.

Secrecy as a reintegration strategy

Secrecy as a coping mechanism has been associated with women combatants who secretly find their way back to their communities, perhaps moving in with family members, friends, or sympathetic adults, and continue to keep a low profile (McKay and Mazurana, 2004). However, our findings from Acholi indicate that even women who are ‘formally’ returned to their communities of origin prefer to relocate subsequently to new places to practise this coping strategy. Secrecy was identified in the interviews as a common way of coping and dealing with stigma. Instead of actively and outwardly reacting to stigma-related experiences, formerly abducted women concentrate on managing the information about them that may lead to them being exposed and subsequently rejected. They must, however, live in secrecy and with the paranoia of their true identity being revealed. By way of example, one participant repeatedly told us at the end of the interview: ‘You should not tell community members that we [interviewed women] were abducted because they will start ill talking about us. I have never told anybody in this area [marital home] that I am from the bush’. This experience goes some way towards indicating the level of dislike of formerly abducted women by a section of home communities and the negative impacts that disclosure may entail.

Reporting their stigmatisers to authorities

Some women in our research reported that when stigmatisation gets worse, and they fear for their lives or being judged for exercising a ‘bush mentality’, they report their stigmatisers to local authorities rather than standing up to them. Akumu, who is 28 and was abducted at the age of nine for nine years, expanded on this vulnerable position that many of these women find themselves post LRA. She said: ‘I am a peaceful person. Suppose someone tries to provoke me with insults, asking for a fight or quarrel. In that case, I keep quiet or will go to the local leader so that the community does not claim that I am aggressive and offensive because I was in the bush, and

that I have a bush mentality'. However, some other women who reported their stigmatisation to authorities expressed disappointment with the local justice system. They conveyed frustration; one woman underlined that 'the challenge remains to get someone who can help me get justice so that those behaving unkindly to me are punished. When we [formerly abducted persons] report our cases to sub-county authorities, we do not get justice'.

Silence as a recovery and reintegration strategy

Silence was another strategy utilised by the participants to respond to stigmatisation. Many said that in most cases, they simply ignore their stigmatisers. It was reported that women often react meekly rather than aggressively and thus avoid confrontation. Yet, silence itself was subject to misconceptions within and by the wider 'normal' home community. Acen reported that adopting silence as a strategy ended up with neighbours wrongly concluding that 'now *cen* has come upon her; she might harm people'. Her experience illustrates that silence has not proved sufficiently to be an effective strategy for protecting former abducted women, let alone contributing to the process of reintegration.

Adopting solitary life as a recovery and reintegration strategy

In addition to silence, the interviews suggest that some formerly abducted women find/seek solace in self-isolation as a means to escape stigmatisation. Consider this experience:

All I am doing now is to concentrate on things I can do with minimal interaction with others. I isolate myself from those abusive people. I no longer attend some of the community gatherings. I prefer to spend my time alone in my home. To avoid being a bother to the sub-county leaders, I have also stopped visiting them to follow up on my complaints.

Confined to their families, the formerly abducted women stayed away from community gatherings or events that would normally provide the necessary environment to bring people closer together. Isolation experiences are perhaps best encapsulated by 20-year-old Aneno, who was abducted at the age of 11 for 10 years. She left the LRA with two children fathered by a rebel man. Back home, Aneno relies on isolation as a means of coping with stigma by her community. She only leaves her father's compound on Sundays for worship and prayers at church. Of even more interest is that in an attempt to avoid mixing with her community, she does not attend her local church but walks for almost two hours to one in a neighbouring town.

Concluding remarks

Stigmatisation is a persistent challenge facing formerly abducted women as they seek to engage in the process of recovery and reintegration in post-conflict northern

Uganda. The research found that stigmatisation takes different forms and constitutes perhaps the single most challenging barrier to recovery and post-conflict social reintegration, hindering formerly abducted women from accessing opportunities available within their home communities. Notably, stigmatisation arising from culture and traditions adversely affects opportunities for developing and nurturing meaningful social relationships. Participation by formerly abducted women is severely compromised, reducing their hope and prospects significantly. Our findings indicate that factors leading to their stigmatisation are unique as they challenge common conventions that reintegration and repatriation are critical, necessary, and a solution to displacement.

Individual rights, if not adequately addressed, will continue to be violated in communities of northern Uganda. It seems that societal culture can be a paradox: providing, on the one hand, an environment to protect sections of a community, while actively excluding some on the other. Within their daily experiences, formerly abducted women have had to contend with negative stereotyping and prejudices that affect their marriage prospects and their attempts to form important and influential networks that can benefit them as they seek to reintegrate into post-conflict society. From this research, it appears that completely meaningful and productive reintegration (inclusion) of formerly abducted persons is challenging in that the cultural environment is not always fully conducive to successful recovery and reintegration.

Stigmatisation based on some cultural values and traditions has steadily pushed formerly abducted women further away and into the margins of Acholi society. Since it is deeply rooted in the collective culture of the Acholi sub-region, meaningful and productive recovery and reintegration may need to focus on addressing the structural causes of stigmatisation, marginalisation, discrimination, and vulnerability. Furthermore, greater appreciation of societal culture, effective legislation, and vigorous advocacy can be effective ways of realising protection for formerly abducted women.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Correspondence

Allen Kiconco, Visiting Fellow, Department of Political Studies, School of Social Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand, 1 Jan Smuts Avenue, Braamfontein 2000, Johannesburg, South Africa. E-mail: kiconcoaa@gmail.com

Endnotes

- ¹ This paper is based on research undertaken for doctoral work at the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom. The study focused on LRA abductions and captivity, rehabilitation, reintegration, and post-conflict reconstruction, and especially the lived experiences of formerly abducted women in the Acholi sub-region. The arguments emerged, therefore, as key insights. The research received ethical approval from the University of Birmingham and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology.
- ² For a detailed political history and the origin of Acholi people and culture, see Girling (1960) and Atkinson (1994).
- ³ Cultural cleansing as a reintegration strategy in the Acholi sub-region is beyond the scope of this paper. For more information on cleansing rituals, see, for example, Behrend (1999), Liu Institute for Global Issues and Gulu District NGO Forum (2005), Okumu (2005), Harlacher (2009), and Kiconco (2021).
- ⁴ Stigmatisation also targets formerly abducted men (Macdonald and Kerali, 2020) and these women's children born in the LRA (Apio, 2016; Kiconco, 2022).
- ⁵ In addition to human *cen*, the Acholi concept of *cen* often also includes the spirits of large wild animals in the bushes that can afflict human beings in the same way as does human *cen*. The interviews indicated that appropriate spiritual cleansing has to be done to free the afflicted person (Kiconco, 2021).

References

- Acan, G. (2017) *Not Yet Sunset: A Story of Survival and Perseverance in LRA Captivity*. Fountain Publishers, Kampala.
- Acan, G., E. Amony, J. Harris, and M. Davidson (2019) 'How formerly abducted women in post-conflict situations are reasserting their humanity in a hostile environment: photovoice evidence from northern Uganda'. *Gender and Development*, 27(2). pp. 273–294.
- Amony, E. (2015) *I Am Evelyn Amony: Reclaiming My Life from the Lord's Resistance Army*. University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, WI.
- Anderson, R. (2018) 'Compromise without virtue: male child soldier reintegration in Sierra Leone'. In J.D. Brewer, B.C. Hayes, and F. Teeney (eds.) *The Sociology of Compromise after Conflict*. Palgrave, London. pp. 179–206.
- Annan, J., C. Blattman, and R. Horton (2006) *The State of Youth and Youth Protection in Northern Uganda: Findings from the Survey for War Affected Youth (SWAY)*. United Nations Children's Fund, Kampala.
- Annan, J., C. Blattman, D. Mazurana, and K. Carlson (2011) 'Civil war, reintegration, and gender in northern Uganda'. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 55(6). pp. 877–908.
- Annan, J., C. Blattman., K. Carlson, and D. Mazurana (2008) *The State of Female Youth in Northern Uganda: Findings from the Survey of War-affected Youth (SWAY)*. Phase II. April. Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, Somerville, MA.
- Annan, J., M. Brier, and F. Aryemo (2009) 'From rebel to returnee: daily life and reintegration for young soldiers in northern Uganda'. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 24(6). pp. 639–667.
- Apio, E.O. (2016) *Children Born of War in Northern Uganda: Kinship, Marriage, and the Politics of Post-conflict Reintegration in Lango Society*. A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Department of History and Cultures, School of Law and Arts, University of Birmingham. January. <https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/6926/> (last accessed on 4 March 2022).
- Atkinson, R.R. (1994) *The Roots of Ethnicity: The Origins of the Acholi of Uganda Before 1800*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, PA.
- Baines, E. (2017) *Buried in the Heart: Women, Complex Victimhood and the War in Northern Uganda*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

- Behrend, H. (1999) *Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirits: War in Northern Uganda, 1985–1997*. James Currey, Oxford.
- Bernstein, E. (2009) *Social Suffering in Northern Uganda*. Senior Thesis Projects. The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN.
- Betancourt, T.S. et al. (2008) *Psychosocial Adjustment and Social Reintegration of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups: The State of the Field and Future Directions*. Psychology Beyond Borders, Austin, TX.
- Blattmann, C. and J. Annan (2010) 'On the nature and causes of LRA abduction: what the abductees say'. In T. Allen and K. Vlassenroot (eds.) *The Lord's Resistance Army: Myth and Reality Zones*. Zed Books, London. pp. 132–155.
- Boothby, N. (2006) 'When former child soldiers grow up: the keys to reintegration and reconciliation'. In N. Boothby, A. Strang, and M. Wessells (eds.) *A World Turned Upside Down: Social Ecological Approaches to Children in War Zones*. Kumarian Press, Bloomfield, CT. pp. 155–179.
- Bowd, R. and A. Ozerdem (2013) 'How to assess social reintegration of ex-combatants'. *Journal of Intervention and State Building*. 7(4). pp. 453–475.
- Branch, A. (2011) *Displacing Human Rights: War and Intervention in Northern Uganda*. Oxford University Press, New York, NY.
- Coulter, C. (2009) *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers: Women's Lives Through War and Peace in Sierra Leone*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.
- Creswell, J. (2013) *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Dijker, A.J.M. and W. Koomen (2007) *Stigmatisation, Tolerance and Repair: An Integrative Psychological Analysis of Responses to Deviance*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Dolan, C.G. (2009) *Social Torture: The Case of Northern Uganda, 1986–2006*. Berghahn Books, New York, NY.
- Dubal, S. (2018) *Against Humanity: Lessons from the Lord's Resistance Army*. University of California Press, Oakland, CA.
- Finnstrom, S. (2008) *Living with Bad Surroundings: War, History, and Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda*. Duke University Press, Durham, NC.
- Girling, F.K. (1960) *The Acholi of Uganda*. Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London.
- Harlacher, T. (2009) *Traditional Ways of Coping with Consequences of Traumatic Stress in Acholiland: Northern Ugandan Ethnography from a Western Psychological Perspective*. A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Department of Psychology, University of Freiburg. October. <https://doc.rero.ch/record/17432/files/HarlacherT.pdf> (last accessed on 4 March 2022).
- Justice and Reconciliation Project (2007) 'Abomination': *Local Belief Systems and International Justice*. Field Notes No. 5. September. Liu Institute for Global Issues and Gulu District NGO Forum, Gulu.
- Kiconco, A. (2021) *Gender, Conflict and Reintegration in Uganda: Abducted Girls, Returning Women*. Routledge, London.
- Kiconco, A. (2022) 'Children born of wartime captivity and abuse: politics and practices of integration in northern Uganda'. In N. Howard and S. Okyere (eds.) *International Child Protection: Towards Politics and Participation*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. pp. 101–119.
- Kiconco, A. and M. Nthakomwa (2018) 'Marriage for the "new woman" from the Lord's Resistance Army: experiences of female ex-abductees in Acholi region of Uganda'. *Women's Studies International Forum*. 68 (May–June). pp. 65–74.
- Liu Institute for Global Issues and Gulu District NGO Forum (2005) *Roco Wat I Acoli. Restoring Relations in Acholi-land: Traditional Approaches to Reintegration and Justice*. September. https://sppga.ubc.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2016/03/15Sept2005_Roco_Wat_I_Acoli.pdf (last accessed on 4 March 2022).
- Macdonald, A. and R. Kerali (2020) 'Being normal: stigmatisation of Lord's Resistance Army returnees as "moral experience" in post-war northern Uganda'. *Journal of Refugee Studies*. 33(4). pp. 766–790.

- McKay, S. and D. Mazurana (2004) *Where are the Girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After the War*. Rights and Democracy, Montreal, QC.
- Meintjes, S., A. Pillay, and M. Turshen (eds.) (2001) 'Introduction'. In S. Meintjes, A. Pillay, and M. Turshen (eds.) *The Aftermath: Women in Post-conflict Societies*. Zed Books, London.
- Metsola, L. (2006) "'Reintegration" of ex-soldiers and former fighters: a lens into state formation and citizenship in Namibia'. *Third World Quarterly*. 27(6). pp. 1119–1135.
- Mukasa, N. (2017) 'War child mothers in northern Uganda: the civil war forgotten legacy'. *Development in Practice*. 27(3). pp. 354–367.
- Ndossi, E. (2010) 'Stigma as encountered by female returnees and the role of the church in northern Uganda'. In M. Bard (ed.) *Culture, Religion, and the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers in Northern Uganda*. Peter Lang, New York, NY. pp. 133–148.
- Nussio, E. (2012) 'Emotional legacies of war among former Colombian paramilitaries'. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*. 28(4). pp. 369–383.
- Ofumbi, D.W. (2012) *Identity and Transformation: Study of Significance of African Christianity in Christian Transforming Transformation*. Xulon Press, Maitland, FL.
- Okumu, J. (2005) 'The Acholi people's rites of reconciliation'. *The Examiner*. Human Rights Focus, Gulu.
- Oloya, O. (2013) *Child to Soldier: Stories from Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army*. University of Toronto Press, London.
- p'Bitek, O. (1986) *Artist the Ruler: Essays on Art, Culture and Values*. East African Educational Publishers, Nairobi.
- Pham, N.P., P. Vinck., and E. Stover (2007) *Abduction: The Lord's Resistance Army and Forced Conscriptation in Northern Uganda*. University of California, Berkeley, CA.
- Porter, H. (2013) *After Rape: Justice and Social Harmony in Northern Uganda*. A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. April. Department of International Development, London School of Economics, London. <http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/717/> (last accessed on 4 March 2022).
- Porter, H. (2017) *After Rape: Violence, Justice, and Social Harmony in Uganda*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Porter, H. (2019) 'Moral spaces and sexual transgression: understanding rape in war and post conflict'. *Development and Change*. 50(4). pp. 1009–1032.
- Prunier, G. (2004) 'Rebel movements and proxy warfare: Uganda, Sudan and the Congo (1986–1999)'. *African Affairs*. 103(412). pp. 359–383.
- Titeca, K. (2010) 'The spiritual Order of the LRA'. In T. Allen and K. Vlassenroot (eds.) *The Lord's Resistance Army: Myth and Reality*. Zed Press, London. pp. 59–73.
- Tonheim, M. (2012) "'Who will comfort me?" Stigmatisation of girls formerly associated with armed forces and groups in eastern Congo'. *The International Journal of Human Rights*. 16(2). pp. 278–297.
- Torjesen, S. (2013) 'Towards a theory of ex-combatant reintegration'. *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*. 2(3). Article number: 63. <http://doi.org/10.5334/sta.cx>.
- UN (United Nations) (2006) *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Disarmament Standards*. UN, New York, NY.
- UNHCR (United Nations Refugee Agency) (2011) *Resettlement Learning Programme Handbook*. UNHCR, Geneva.
- UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) (2007) *The Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups*. February. UNICEF, Geneva.
- Van Acker, F. (2004) 'Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army: the new order no one ordered'. *African Affairs*. 103(412). pp. 335–357.
- Van Leeuwen, J.M. et al. (2018) 'Community reintegrating former child soldiers in northern Uganda: a qualitative study on the road to recovery'. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*. 28(2). pp. 105–109.
- Vastapu, L. (2018) *Liberia's Women Veterans: War, Roles and Reintegration*. Zed Books, London.
- Victor, L. and H. Porter (2017) 'Dirty things: spiritual pollution and life after the Lord's Resistance Army'. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*. 11(4). pp. 590–608.