REINTEGRATION OF FORMER CHILD SOLDIERS IN POST-CONFLICT SETTINGS

a case study of Northern Uganda

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“The rehabilitation process has actually just begun”

NGO worker

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This thesis has been written as part of the Master programme International Crimes and Criminology (ICC) at the VU University of Amsterdam. Throughout this programme, I have studied the international crimes of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity from various perspectives. Important questions that have been dealt with are “What is the impact of international crimes on individuals and a (post-conflict) society as a whole?” and “how can victims and perpetrators ever be reconciled in the aftermath of such massive human rights violations?”

Based on these questions, I have developed a strong interest in the phenomenon of child soldiering. Generally, child soldiers can be considered victims (as they are usually severely mistreated and/or forced into armed conflict) as well as perpetrators of international crimes (as they are often involved in the committing of horrific human rights violations). As this severely complicates the process of transitional justice and the (psychological and social) healing of the people and societies involved, I decided to devote the topic of my thesis on this phenomenon. More specifically, I have focussed on the process of reintegration, through which former child soldiers need to find their way back into civilian life, after returning from the armed forces.

This thesis marks the end of my time as a student in the ICC programme. I am looking at this with sadness and joy at the same time. Sadness, because it is the end of an important period in my life and joy because I am looking forward to what the future will bring me. Participating in this programme has made me grow, as an academic and on a personal level; it helped me discover my true interests and competences, which has made me more confident on what I want to achieve in life. In addition, I found the ICC staff to be very flexible and willing to support me in the choices I made. As a result, I was not only able to participate in the Research Track – an additional programme where I had the opportunity to broaden my knowledge on criminological research methodologies – I was also given the opportunity to conduct fieldwork in a (post)conflict setting in Sub Sahara Africa, which is my true passion, stemming from my background in the field of Anthropology.

I strongly believe that conducting fieldwork is important, or even necessary, when analysing a (post)conflict situation. A literature study, no matter how much has been written on a specific topic, will not provide the same kind of knowledge and information as obtained when being in the field yourself. Seeing war-affected areas with your own eyes, listening to the stories of survivors –
perpetrators as well as victims – and experience their way of living, is in my view essential to adequately understand and interpret the context of a specific (post)conflict situation.

My journey throughout this research project has been challenging in many ways: finding a way to conceptualize my interests and ideas in a suitable academic framework, searching for funding to realize this project, conducting fieldwork in Uganda – a country I had never visited before – and listen to the stories of so many people who have been severely affected by two decades of warfare. However, until the very end, I enjoyed participating in the ICC programme as well as working on this research project and I hope to continue working in this particular field of criminology in the near future.

Karin Monster
Amsterdam, July 2014
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I owe my gratitude to many people who have supported me throughout this research project. In general, I would like to thank the Ugandan people who I have met throughout my stay, for the uniquely warm welcome they have given me on several occasions, as well as for their friendliness and willingness to assist me whenever they saw a possibility to do so. I have never felt more at home in a country previously unfamiliar to me.

In particular, I would like to thank Obina Charles for sharing his life story with me in all openness and honesty, for showing me his home village and introducing me to his family. I have great respect for his warm character and his determination to become a successful man. Furthermore, I would like to thank Fred for welcoming me into his organisation, where I not only enjoyed the dancing performances of war-affected children, but where I was also able to talk to some of these individuals about their experiences as a child soldier as well as their reintegration trajectories.

Thanks to Godfrey, Sam and especially Alfred for their friendship and company throughout my stay in Gulu town. They were always willing to provide me with the necessary background information about the culture and history of the Acholi people and their recent confrontation with a brutal war. They not only shared their personal (life) stories with me, but also introduced me to other people who became of great value to this research project.

In addition, I would like to thank my supervisor Joris van Wijk for his enthusiastic guidance throughout this research project. His constructive criticism has been very helpful in improving this thesis’ structure and content during various stages of the project. Partly due to his support, I was able to realise the thing I wanted to do most: conducting fieldwork in a post-conflict society in Sub Sahara Africa. In this context, I would also like to express my gratitude to ‘Jo Kolk Studiefonds’, the foundation that provided me with the necessary funding to realize my fieldwork.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for supporting me in various ways and especially for their sincere interest in the people of Northern Uganda, who have been severely affected by the devastating war and its aftermath. To share with them the life stories of people on the other side of the world, who are generally unable to tell their story themselves, turned out to be a surprisingly positive experience. In particular, I would like to thank Lotte de Jonker, in whose presence I spent countless of hours working on this thesis and with whom I could share the joyful, as well as the more difficult moments of this process. Her company and support has been of great value.
MAP OF UGANDA

Source: http://www.newdestinyafrica.com (visited 03-10-2013, 11:49)
MAP OF LRA AFFECTED AREAS

Source: Annan, Blattman, & Horton, 2006: xi
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of actively recruiting children under the age of 18, by persuasion or coercion, to fight in or otherwise provide support for state or non-state parties in armed conflict – also known as the phenomenon of child soldiering – is an alarming global development (Fox, 2005). The most recent estimations indicate that around 250,000 - 300,000 children serve in both government forces as well as non-state armed groups, in at least 86 countries and territories worldwide (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (CSUCS), 2008a).¹

In many instances, military leaders deliberately recruit children – sometimes as young as eight years old (Human Rights Watch, 2012a) – because they are thought to be more prone to indoctrination, less questioning of commands and less remorseful than adults (Boyden, 2003). They are often forced to commit horrific atrocities, even against their own family or community members (Human Rights Watch, 2012a). As a consequence, these children generally become victims as well as perpetrators of extreme violence.

Exposure to, and/or participation in, armed conflict may have major implications for the development of children; once returned from the armed forces, they are often faced with extreme difficulties when trying to adjust to civilian life. In addition, their (mass) involvement in conflict generally causes major political and social unease amongst the international community as well as in the countries where child soldiering is, or was, an essential part of warfare (Boyden, 2003).

A variety of programmes have been developed to support the reintegration process of child soldiers returning from the armed forces.² These reintegration programmes – often designed in a largely ad hoc manner – generally provide for short-term (psychosocial) assistance upon a former child soldier’s return. They specifically tend to focus on the processes of reunification between the

² Reintegration has been defined by the UN as ‘the assistance given to combatants to enable them to re-enter civil society’ (Maina, 2009a). The term reintegration is often used interchangeable with the concept of rehabilitation, without properly defining or distinguishing the two concepts (See for example, Derluyn et al., 2013; Akello, Richters & Reis, 2006; Veale, & Stavrour, 2011). For the aim of this research, the term reintegration is used consistently, the only exception being quotations of respondents.
returnee and his or her family and reinsertion into the community (Derluyn, Vindevogel, & Haene de, 2013; Knight, 2008; Maina, 2009b).

Yet, reintegration is a complex, long-term process, reaching far beyond the practices of reunification and reinsertion. Reintegration generally takes place in a post-conflict society, where entire communities are affected by collective trauma and where most of the societal, economic and political structures are destroyed by warfare (Wessells, 2004). Consequently, former child soldiers not only have to deal with their individual reintegration process and (psychological) healing; they equally face the challenges related to the aftermath of the war (Derluyn et al., 2013). However, long-term reintegration assistance and follow-up support to former child soldiers, are generally limited (Maina, 2009a; Corbin, 2008) and little research has been done on their activities and wellbeing after they have been reinserted into the community. As a result, little is known about the long-term impacts of military activity and war violence on children and youth (Blattman, 2006).

Several academics have acknowledged the need for additional in-depth studies related to long-term reintegration of former child soldiers. Derluyn et al., e.g. state: “Important gaps remain in our knowledge base about child soldiers’ long-term evolutions, which could help us to better understand how their trajectories can be supported in the best way”(Derluyn et al., 2013: 881). In a similar vein Blattman argues: “Very simply, there is a need for more research in more zones of conflict worldwide” (Blattman, 2006: 32). Taking the above into account, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature on child soldiering and reintegration, by focussing on long-term reintegration of former LRA child soldiers in Northern Uganda.

During its two-decade long battle against the Ugandan government, the Lord’s Resistance Army (the LRA), abducted at least 25,000 children from the northern provinces, who were turned into soldiers or were used for ‘combat support roles’ such as cooking, carrying loads or, on a regular basis, for sexual purposes (CSUCS, 2008b). During the 1990s and the early years of 2000, this non-governmental rebel force was almost exclusively made up of children under the age of 18. Most of the abductees who survived the war, have by now been resettled into society for a number of years, as most returned home before the LRA’s retreat in 2007 (CSUCS, 2008a). Although contemporary Northern Uganda is experiencing relative peace and stability, the question how to deal with the massive number of returning LRA abductees, has presented a massive challenge.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Throughout the years, a large amount of research has been conducted on reintegration of former LRA abductees. Most studies have taken place by the time the war was still ongoing and/or focussed on the early stages of the reintegration process. As a consequence, it is largely unknown how they have managed to cope with their past over the long run and how they fare in Ugandan society (CSUCS, 2008b). This explorative study aims to fill this lack of knowledge, by providing a structured analysis of the long-term reintegration process and outcome of former LRA child soldiers within post-conflict Northern Uganda. The central research question has been formulated as follows:

‘To what extent have former LRA child soldiers successfully reintegrated in post-conflict Northern Uganda?’

As little is known about long-term reintegration of former LRA child soldiers, it was found necessary to conduct an in-depth study in the field. Based on qualitative research, a two-month period of fieldwork has been conducted, predominantly in the Northern Provinces of Gulu, Pader and Lira. A more detailed description of the methodological foundation on which this study is based, will be provided in chapter 4.

This thesis consists of two parts. Part 1 contains a literature study, based on both academic literature as well as reports from intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs). Consisting of the following two chapters, it starts with a literature review on the phenomenon of child soldiering, as well as the process of reintegration and the (lasting) impacts of military activity and war violence on youth (chapter 2). Chapter 3 reflects on the origins and the nature of the conflict between the LRA and the Ugandan government, as well as the LRA’s abduction practices and its systematic use of child soldiers.

Part 2 is empirical in nature. As mentioned above, chapter 4 presents the methodology of this study, reflecting on both the strengths and weaknesses of the research design. The fifth and sixth chapter will present the actual field data. Chapter 5 reflects on the process of reintegration within the context of post-conflict Northern Uganda, whereas chapter 6 provides the outcome of long-term reintegration of former LRA child soldiers. Lastly, chapter 7 contains a final conclusion and discussion which reflect on the results of this study, as well as on the contribution of the findings to (future) policy and theory related to reintegration of former child soldiers.

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4 This includes inter alia: Acker van, 2004; Akello et al., 2006; Annan et al., 2006; Annan et al., 2009; Blattman & Annan, 2008&2010; Branch, 2007; Corbin, 2008; Maina, 2009a&b; Okello et al., 2007; Pfeiffer & Elbert, 2011; Pham et al., 2008 & 2009; Veale & Stavrou, 2011; Vinck & Pham, 2009.
PART 1

CHILD SOLDIERING, REINTEGRATION AND THE UGANDAN CIVIL WAR
CHAPTER 2

CHILD SOLDIERING AND REINTEGRATION

Most definitions used by intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) to describe a child soldier, are related to the definition as documented in the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (the Paris Principles).\(^5\) This definition describes a child associated with an armed force or armed group as "any person below 18 years of age who is, or who has been, recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including, but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes".\(^6\) Hence, to be classified as a child soldier, one does not necessarily have to take direct part in hostilities; the definition refers to a broader range of activities, related to "combat support" roles.

Nowadays, the principle that children should not be involved in armed conflict is almost universally accepted; since the beginning of the 21st century, numerous legal obligations and international treaties have been developed to support efforts to stop the use of child soldiers. These instruments can be found in International Humanitarian Law, International Criminal Law and International Human Rights Law, as well as in several UN Security Council Resolutions and Regional Standards.\(^7\)

2.1 Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers as an International Crime

Concern for children within International Humanitarian Law, also referred to as ‘the laws of war’, has a long history. However, it was not until 1977, with the appearance of the Additional Protocols to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 that a minimum age for recruitment or use in armed conflict was


\(^7\) As it is outside the scope of this thesis to elaborate in full extent on all existing bodies of law, only the most important instruments will shortly be discussed. For a complete overview, see also the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Minimum Age Convention 138; the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 182; the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child; Art. 38 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Security Council resolutions 1261 (1999), 1314 (2000), 1379 (2001), 1460 (2003), 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005), 1882 (2009) and 1998 (2011) on children and armed conflict.
set (Fox, 2005). The Protocols set a minimum age of 15 that applies to both governmental and non-governmental parties, in international as well as internal armed conflict. More recently, through the establishment of several special war crime tribunals and the permanent International Criminal Court (the ICC), the international community has made a commitment to end impunity for those most responsible for committing international crimes. The first steps towards establishing individual criminal responsibility for those who have been involved in recruiting and using children in hostilities, have therefore been taken. In 2007, the Special Court for Sierra Leone convicted three high ranking members of the armed group ‘AFRC’ on charges relating to the recruitment and use of children, which represented the first ever convictions before an international criminal court. The Court’s more recent conviction of the former Liberian president Charles Taylor, marks the first time a former head of state has been found guilty of these crimes. Furthermore, in its first trial, the ICC convicted the Congolese armed-group leader Thomas Lubanga Dyilo on charges of enlisting, conscripting and using children in hostilities. In relation to the Ugandan case, charges of forcible recruitment and use of children in armed conflict have been included in the arrest warrants against Joseph Kony – the leader of the LRA – and his four senior commanders.

The most important instrument that prohibits the conscription or use of children within international human rights law, is the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC). The OPAC, whose rules are binding for all states that have ratified the protocol, sets 18 as the minimum age for direct participation in hostilities. Currently, 156 states have ratified the Protocol, including Uganda, that acceded on May 6th 2002.

The Paris Principles –as mentioned above – have been established to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups. The specific objective is to prevent the

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8 See Article 77(2) of Additional Protocol I and Article 4(3)(c) of the Additional Protocol II.
9 International crimes – manifestations of political violence committed within a specific political, institutional or ideological context – constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. Source: Smelulers, A. & Grünfeld (2011).
10 Special Court for Sierra Leone, Trial Chamber II, SCSL-04-16-T, Judgment. 20 June 2007. P. 566-567.
11 Special Court for Sierra Leone, Trial Chamber II, SCSL-03-01-T, Judgment. 18 May 2012. P. 2476.
12 International Criminal Court, Pre-Trial Chamber I, ICC-01/04-01/06-2842, Judgment pursuant to Article 74 of the Statute. 14 March 2012.
13 These four senior commanders are Vincent Otti, Okot Odhiambo, Raska Lukwiyia, and Dominic Ongwen, although the proceedings against Mr Lukwiyia have been terminated after the confirmation of his death. The four remaining suspects (including Joseph Kony) are currently still at large. (http://www.icc-cpi.int/en_menus/icc/situations%20and%20cases/Pages/situations%20and%20cases.aspx, retrieved, 23 October 2013).
occurrence of child soldiering, to secure the release of children concerned and to support their reintegration (CSUCS, 2008a). As at December 2012, 105 states—including Uganda—have endorsed the Principles.\(^{16}\)

2.2 DDR Operations; Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration

Despite the existence of all these international legal obligations and treaties, numerous states still undermine these instruments by continuing to target under-18s—or even under-15s—for military purposes. Although fewer states are recruiting and using child soldiers,\(^ {17}\) the gap between what governments say and what they do still remains wide. For instance, many states have so far failed to develop effective measures to prevent child soldiering, even in those forces over which they have direct control (Child Soldiers International, 2012).

When it comes to non-state armed groups, the recruitment and use of minors remains widespread. Although there are no exact numbers available, Human Rights Watch documented in 2012 that children were used in hostilities by (a multitude of) non-state armed groups in at least 13 countries worldwide.\(^ {18}\) These groups include “self-defence” militias, paramilitaries and rebel forces, and many of them have significant numbers of children in their ranks (Child Soldiers International, 2012). They often operate without any respect for human rights or international law, are resistant to (political) pressure and have regularly been proved to be beyond the reach of IGOs and NGOs (CSUCS, 2008a).

Due to the still widespread use of child soldiers by both state and non-state armed groups, multidimensional peacekeeping operations led by the United Nations (UN)—called disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) operations—have become a key intervention when it comes to assisting these children (Maina, 2009a). DDR is a formal procedure whereby soldiers are officially released from the armed forces—usually followed by a peace agreement—and are returned to civilian life (Uppard, 2003; Betancourt et al., 2010a). Although DDR is not specifically designed to assist (former) child soldiers, but to assist (former) soldiers in general, it has often played a significant role in their returning process.

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\(^{17}\) In 2008, Child Soldiers International estimated that 26 countries were known to have under-18s in their ranks (CSUCS, 2008a), while in 2012, it estimated that only ten states had so. However, when including a wider spectrum of forces for which states are responsible, still a total of 17 states were found to have used child soldiers (Child Soldiers International, 2012).

Although there has been no official UN-aid DDR operation in Uganda (CSUCS, 2008a), the efforts to assist the thousands of returning children and youth— who were abducted by the LRA and used in combat or in combat support roles – have been comparable to DDR. In addition, the mayor actors involved in the returning process of these abductees, are similar to those involved in an official DDR operation. Therefore, the three phases of DDR – disarmament, demobilization and reintegration – will shortly be discussed. As reintegration of former LRA child soldiers is the main focus of this thesis, a more in-depth analysis will be conducted on this latter phase of DDR.

The first phase, disarmament, involves soldiers turning in their weapons. It is primarily a military operation concerned with the controlling of arms, in order to create a secure and stable situation out of insecure circumstances (Dzinesa, 2007). The second phase, demobilization, involves disbanding armed groups and releasing former combatants into society (Betancourt et al., 2010a). It is a short-term process as part of a broader transformation from war to peace and typically involves the assembly, quartering, administration and discharge of returning soldiers (Hughes-Wilson & Wilkinson, 2001).

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19 See chapter 5 for more information on the returning process of the LRA abductees in Northern Uganda.
Chapter 2: Child Soldiering and Reintegration

The last phase of DDR, reintegration, has been defined by the UN as ‘the assistance given to combatants to enable them to re-enter civil society’ (Maina, 2009b). Reintegration is a long-term, complex process which can take up several years, requires a large amount of preparation, and calls for extensive follow-up support (Wessells, 2004). It includes social, economic and psychological components: it aims to assist former (child) soldiers to resettle in communities (social component), to help them gain sustainable employment and livelihoods (economic component) and to help them readjust to civilian life and overcome their traumatic experiences related to the war (psychological component) (Maina, 2009a; Kingma, 2004).

In addition to these components of reintegration already mentioned in the current literature, it is possible to distinguish another: the physical component. In many instances, a large proportion of former (child) soldiers return with physical injuries or illnesses and are in great need of medical assistance. Unavailability of this assistance may lead to long-term disability, poor health or even death. Hence, the physical health status of former (child) soldiers and the provision of medical assistance is an essential element of reintegration and should therefore be included when analysing this process.

2.2.1 Reintegration and the larger context

Reintegration not only includes aspects on an individual level – based on the four components mentioned above – but on meso and macro levels as well. Warfare not only affects former (child) soldiers, but entire communities, or even societies as a whole (Vries de & Wiegink, 2011; Derluyn et al., 2013). In (post)conflict situations – especially in circumstances where the laws of war have been violated on a large scale – people have been killed, buildings and properties are destroyed, schools and business closed and families dispersed or displaced (Wessells, 2004). Through processes of separation, violation and repression, the core social fabric of families, kinship and communities are disrupted, while at the same time, entire systems of economic infrastructure have collapsed (Esuruku, 2012; Derluyn et al., 2013).

In most instances, former (child) soldiers are faced with an environment that has changed fundamentally during their absence. At the same time, they themselves have also changed profoundly as a result of their experiences within the armed group (Vries de & Wiegink, 2011).

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20 Maina (2009a) and Kingma (2004) also briefly mention a political component of reintegration, which aims to support returning (child) soldiers to become part of the decision-making process in a community. In the context of this thesis, this additional component of reintegration will not be elaborated upon.

21 See paragraph 2.3.1 for more information.
Reintegration thus becomes strongly interconnected with collective trauma and large-scale recovery and peace-building (Derluyn et al., 2013). Therefore, as entire social, economic and political systems need to be reconstructed and restored, reintegration must be combined with long-term strategies for post-conflict recovery and development (Berdal, 1996 as cited in Maina, 2009b; Wessells, 2004).

2.2.2 Actors involved in reintegration
National governments of countries that have been devastated by war, are generally unable or unwilling to actively be involved in the processes of peacebuilding and development. Most governments simply do not have the resources to provide for proper reintegration (Maina, 2009a) and therefore need the assistance of IGOs and NGOs. However, these governments often use their resources to the advantage of those with power at the cost of the politically voiceless, while claiming to stimulate recovery and development (Harwell and Le Billon, 2009 as cited in Esuruku, 2012). These corrupt tendencies typically encourage inefficient resource management, instead of promoting economic growth and development (Esuruku, 2012). As a result, IGOs and NGOs are, in many instances, actively engaging in, or even leading DDR operations (Derluyn et al., 2013).

As reintegration is a long-term grassroots process, it involves not only these official actors, but the combatants and recipient communities as well (Vries de & Wiegink, 2011). Actors such as religious or community leaders – often working alongside IGOs and NGOs – also play important roles in the planning, implementation and/or funding of reintegration programmes (Dzinesa, 2007).

2.3 Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers; the Four Components
During the last two decades, a large amount of research has been conducted on reintegration of former child soldiers. The results of these studies are not always consistent, partly because they are influenced by the different contexts of the various research areas. It has also been assumed that the length of time spend with an armed group influences reintegration; various studies indicate that the longer a child spends in a war zone, the more difficult this process becomes (Betancourt, Borisova, et al., as cited in Betancourt et al., 2010a; CSUCS, 2008a). However, despite the sometimes inconsistent – or even contradictory – findings, these studies do provide general insights in the reintegration process of former child soldiers and the difficulties they experience upon their return from the armed forces.

The following paragraphs will provide a short overview of the existing literature, based on the four components of reintegration as mentioned in paragraph 2.2. These components must not be seen as mutually exclusive, as in fact, they often influence each other: instability in, or inaccessibility of one
Chapter 2: Child Soldiering and Reintegration

or more components of reintegration, might complicate the realization of other components. For example, an untreated injury or illness (physical component) can hinder someone from gaining sustainable employment (economic component), which in turn might lead to stigmatization or exclusion (social component).

2.3.1 Physical reintegration

Physical reintegration refers to the process whereby former child soldiers are offered medical assistance and sometimes a stable environment in which they can recover from their health related problems. When available, this practice regularly takes place at the beginning of the reintegration process, especially in those cases where severe injuries or illnesses are concerned. Returning child soldiers may suffer from a range of serious health problems, including untreated bullet wounds, joint destruction, loss of limbs, back problems from carrying heavy loads and loss of hearing as a result of proximity to artillery fire (CSUCS, 2008b; Uppard, 2003). In addition, physical injuries and infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS as a result of sexual abuse, are frequently present. Unwanted pregnancies are common and girls might suffer severe complications from giving birth without proper medical care (Uppard, 2003). Despite these range of injuries and illnesses frequently present amongst former child soldiers, there is little reliable data relating to their health, especially when it concerns problems on the long run (Uppard, 2003).

2.3.2 Psychological reintegration

The second component – psychological reintegration – can be defined as ‘the assistance given to former child soldiers which enables them to readjust to civilian life and cope with their war-related experiences’. In the 1990s, there was a widespread assumption that a large number of former child soldiers are coping with a posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) related to their exposure to extreme violence (Uppard, 2003). Nowadays, academics and practitioners are increasingly questioning these assumptions, although recent studies still indicate a high prevalence of PTSD or at least serious symptoms of emotional distress amongst former child soldiers (Pham, Vinck & Stover, 2008; Blattman & Annan, 2010; Okello, Onen & Musisi, 2007; Vindevogel et al., 2013; Pham, Vinck & Stover, 2009; Pfeiffer & Elbert, 2011).

It has also often been assumed that child soldiering has a negative impact on the moral development of children (Wessells, 2004). Since many child soldiers are not only exposed to, but also participate in extreme violence, they are frequently perceived as dangerous youngsters who lost their ability to differentiate between right and wrong. Yet, there is little empirical evidence indicating that child soldiering indeed has a negative impact on moral judgment. To the contradictory; research indicates
Chapter 2: Child Soldiering and Reintegration

that a large amount of former child soldiers is extremely remorseful of their violent past, as many did not choose to carry out violent acts, but instead were forced to take part in these activities (Wessels, 2004; Boyden, 2003).

2.3.3 Social reintegration

The third component – social reintegration – refers to the creation of an environment in which former child soldiers are accepted back into their families and communities (Maina, 2009a). Although it is less common for former child soldiers to be rejected by their own family members upon their return, rejection and stigmatization within the broader community is frequently reported (Vindevogel et al., 2013; Corbin, 2008; Akello, Richters & Reis, 2006; Annan, Brier & Aryemo, 2009).

Boyden (2003) found that anger and mistrust of former child soldiers in Sierra Leone was widespread, as was jealousy at the (material) assistance they were given by aid agencies. The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (2008b) reported that community hostility in Uganda, was frequently present and predominantly stemmed from two causes: Firstly, community members struggled to accept former child soldiers because they had often been involved in brutal violence against their own people. Second, they feared that these children would continue to use violence (CSUCS, 2008b).

Since rejection and stigmatization of former child soldiers is presumed to be widespread, the availability of community sensitization campaigns have been indicated by many scholars as an important determinant of successful reintegration (Betancourt et al., 2010a; Annan et al., 2009; Akello et al., 2006; Corbin, 2008; Pham et al., 2009). According to Wessells, it is extremely important that people learn to understand that former child soldiers are not inherently bad and that “they were politically manipulated in a war created by adults … while they too have suffered enormously” (Wessells, 2004: 520).

2.3.4 Economic reintegration

Economic reintegration – the fourth component – concerns assisting former child soldiers to (re)gain access to means of production and employment (Maina, 2009a). Research indicates that former child soldiers – especially those who have spent a considerable amount of time within the armed forces – have significantly lower levels of education than their peers (Blattman & Annan, 2010; Annan, Blattman & Horton, 2006). As a result, they might lack the necessary (economic) skills to become productive members in their community when growing up. Hence, access to (formal or informal) education is indicated by many scholars as an important element of reintegration. These scholars
argue that education not only enables former child soldiers to develop the necessary skills for future (economic) activities, but also to function in positive social roles (Blattman & Annan, 2010; Williamson, 2006; Annan et al., 2009; Wessells, 2006).

Former child soldiers who attempt to go back to school, are regularly faced with numerous challenges when trying to complete their education. First, they might have poor concentration or physical and/or mental health problems. Second, they might experience peer rejection and social isolation at school (Annan et al., 2006; CSUCS, 2008b). Their education might also be interrupted due to the inability to pay school fees, marriage and pregnancies among girls and the need to take on responsibility for younger siblings. Although these factors are common to all war-affected children, they do seem to be more prevalent amongst former child soldiers (CSUCS, 2008b).

2.4 Measuring Reintegration

Child soldiering is thus thought to place those involved at increased risk of physical or mental health problems (or even a disturbed moral development), as well as rejection by the community and economic hardship. However, a growing number of ethnographic studies have come to a remarkably different conclusion: supposedly, the majority of former child soldiers is able to adjust to civilian life relatively well. Studies supportive of this view suggest that many become integrated civilians and are able to function successfully in their community, both socially and economically (Wessells, 2006; Annan et al., 2009; Boothby, Crawford & Halperin, 2006; Williamson, 2006).

The studies mentioned above, involve data collection relatively soon after demobilization or in the early stages of the reintegration process. Most of the literature focuses on the activities of reintegration programmes,22 while little research has been done on the activities of these children once they have been reinserted into their communities (Maina, 2009a). Hence, little is known about the long-term consequences of child soldiering (Betancourt et al., 2010a). Moreover, little analysis has been done on the efficacy of reintegration programmes and whether they have achieved their main objective of offering returning child soldiers a proper civilian lifestyle (Maina, 2009a; Wessells, 2004). Reliable criteria for determining what success really is and how it should be measured, are generally lacking (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2007).

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22 During the demobilization phase, former child soldiers are often transferred to a rehabilitation centre, designed to accommodate these youths for a short period of time. During their stay in these centres, the transition from military life into civilian life – the reintegration process – begins (Wessells, 2004).
Defining and measuring successful reintegration has proved to be extremely difficult. First, reintegration does not lend itself to ‘counting’, as it not only strives for a return to civilian life, but also for some sort of quality lifestyle. Second, the lack of baseline data and the fact that it extremely hard to figure out which factors caused what effect, makes it is almost impossible to measure reintegration (Vries, de & Wiegink, 2011). Moreover, in most war zones, a large number of child soldiers undergo a so-called spontaneous demobilization: they go home on their own without passing through a formal reintegration process (Wessells, 2004). In Northern Uganda this happened with great regularity.23 The strong focus on the activities of reintegration programmes, therefore excludes an analysis of the reintegration process of those returning home by themselves.

Reintegration – that includes the four components as described above – has in practice often been limited to the short-term processes of reunification with the family and reinsertion into the community, which fall under the heading of the social aspect of reintegration (Knight, 2008; Maina, 2009b; Coppens et al., 2012). Most donor agencies merely provide for short-term funding, typically for periods of one year to eighteen months.24 Reunification and reinsertion are often privileged over longer-term reintegration objectives and the extensive follow-up that this process entails (Maina, 2009a; Corbin, 2008; Wessells, 2004). Organisations frequently fail to take into account what comes after reinsertion and plans to ensure that former child soldiers are prepared for their return, and have opportunities within, civilian life are often lacking (Maina, 2009a; Wessells, 2004). As a consequence, reintegration programmes have repeatedly not tailored to the specific needs of former child soldiers and their communities (Maina, 2009a; CSUCS, 2008a).

2.5 Long-Term Consequences of Child Soldiering

Only a handful of studies have addressed the potentially long-term consequences of child soldiering. A first study, conducted by Santacruz and Arana in 2002 (as sited in Betancourt et al., 2010a), focussed on 239 former child soldiers, who had belonged to armed groups in El Salvador, nearly 10 years after the conflict ended. The results of this study show that a majority continued to have recurrent memories of war-related violence: 20% still suffered from insomnia and 16% reported persistent nightmares, while 39% said that they felt depressed quite often and 37% were easily annoyed and angered. These results highlight the potential psychological struggles faced by adults, who were involved with armed groups during their childhood.

23 See chapter 5 for more information on the returning process of former LRA child soldiers in Northern Uganda.
24 Donor funding often decreases together with the cessation of armed conflict (Derlyun et al., 2013), creating an artificial division of funding between the emergency phase, post-conflict recovery and development (CSUCS, 2008a).
Additionally, at the time of writing, two prospective longitudinal studies of former child soldiers have been conducted. The first study, conducted by Betancourt et al. (2010), has investigated the psychosocial adjustment of former child soldiers in Sierra Leone. The study began in 2002 with a baseline assessment of 260 former child soldiers and had a two year period of follow up. The results show that former child soldiers’ war experiences do have long-term consequences, but that the nature and extent of these consequences are influenced by post-conflict risk and protective factors (Betancourt et al., 2010b). Two specific forms of violence – killing and rape – were particularly found to influence long-term psychosocial adjustment. While killing was associated with increasing externalizing problems and decreasing levels of adaptive and pro-social behaviours, being raped predicted higher levels of internalizing problems like anxiety and depression. Improved community acceptance was found to be the most influential protective factor and was associated with pro-social attitudes and reduced depression (Betancourt et al., 2010a).

The second study, conducted by Boothby, Crawford & Halperin (2006), concerned 39 former child soldiers from Mozambique who were followed over a period of 16 years. They found that, after 16 years, the majority of these former child soldiers had reintegrated successfully. Most had regained a foothold in the economic life of (rural) Mozambique, were happily married, took active care of their children and were engaged in the collective affairs of their communities. Only a few of them had been unable to take hold of their lives or continued their violent ways (Boothby et al., 2006). However, they concluded that these former child soldiers still struggled with the psychological component of reintegration, even at the last point of assessment. All of them reported facing recurrent thoughts and memories of traumatic events, while 50% reported symptoms indicative of traumatic stress reactions when reminded of those events (Boothby, 2006). Moreover, the need of these former child soldiers to be accepted by their families, peers and communities, led to the conclusion that community sensitization campaigns and the performance of traditional community rites, are extremely important activities during the reintegration process. In contrast to the dominant view that access to education is an important element of reintegration, educational programmes were not deemed to be helpful. These programmes tended to cause tensions in several families because it singled out one child (the former child soldier) for support over the others. Besides, most respondents had not been motivated to stay in school, as they felt the need to earn money (Boothby et al., 2006).

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25 Data for this study was collected between 1988 and 2004.
2.6 Conclusion

Although the principle that children should not be involved in armed conflict is well established in numerous legal obligations and international treaties, the recruitment and use of child soldiers remains widespread: numerous state and non-state armed groups continue to target under-18s.

The official returning process of surviving child soldiers typically involve three steps: disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR). Reintegration – the most extensive part of DDR – is a complex, long-term process, as it often takes place within a post-conflict society and is heavily influenced by the broader (social, economic and political) context of these war-affected regions. Reintegration consists of at least four components: it aims to assist former child soldiers to resettle in communities (social component), to support them to gain sustainable employment and livelihoods (economic component), to help them deal with traumatic experiences related to the war (psychological component) and to provide for medical care to those returning with injuries and/or illnesses (physical component).

Despite these four aspects of reintegration, programmes on the ground predominantly focus on the short-term processes of family reunification and reinsertion into the community, which fall under the social component of reintegration. Long-term reintegration assistance is generally lacking and follow up support to former child soldiers and their communities, is limited. Consequently, little is known about the long-term consequences of child soldiering and how their reintegration trajectories develop after the process of reinsertion. The little studies available, indicate that former child soldiers are able to reintegrate successfully, although problems related to the psychological component of reintegration, seem to be persistent over the long run.
CHAPTER 3

THE UGANDAN CIVIL WAR AND THE LRA’S ABDUCTION PRACTICES

The civil war in Northern Uganda erupted in the late 1980s and has lasted for over two decades. The main parties to the conflict – the government army called the NRA (that was renamed the UPDF in 1995) and the nongovernmental rebel force known as the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) – ignored International Humanitarian Law on a large scale. As a result, many civilians became the victims of a brutal civil war in which countless international crimes have been committed. Especially the Acholi people living in the (former) districts of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader, but also people of other ethnicities living in the Lango and Teso sub-regions have been severely victimized by the war. Crimes like looting, mutilation, rape and execution of non-combatants have been committed on a large scale by both parties to the conflict. However, it were predominantly the LRA’s widespread abduction practices – in which thousands of children were captured as a method of forced conscription – that have made the war extremely notorious (Acker van, 2004; Branch, 2007).

3.1 Historical Background of the Conflict

The civil war in Northern Uganda has resulted from deep historical roots. Two characteristics of Uganda’s political history particularly seem to have played a role in the development of the conflict: the marginalization of the northern provinces during the colonial period and the militarization of politics during the postcolonial era (Doom & Vlassenroot, 1999; Nannyonjo, 2005).

Historically, Uganda’s economic power rested in the South while the military power was dominated by the Acholi people; an ethnic group, predominantly living in the northern provinces. During the period of British colonial rule, a division between Northern and Southern Uganda was created, with respect to economic development as well as the organisation of labour recruitment. The British established most industrial centres as well as agricultural plantations in the South, whereas the people from the northern provinces were recruited to fulfil cheap labour in these areas (Doom & Vlassenroot, 1999; Nannyonjo, 2005). The economic marginalization of the North eventually led to a

26 After the war, the districts of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader have been divided into multiple, smaller districts. Throughout this thesis, when mentioning one of these three districts, referral is made to the districts as they existed during the war.

27 See page vi for the map indicating the LRA affected areas in Uganda.
high rate of army recruitment among the Acholi people, as a means to improve their livelihoods (Doom & Vlassenroot, 1999).

This division between the North and the South persisted after Uganda’s independence from the British in 1962. As a result, the armed forces of Uganda’s first prime minister, Milton Obote, were predominantly operated by the Acholi. Bound together by a common culture, they came to see themselves as “the military backbone of the state” (Doom & Vlassenroot, 1999: 8). This new Acholi identity is said to have played a key role in the initial tensions between the North and the rest of the country.

Postcolonial Uganda has been characterized by political instability and authoritarian, military rule. Several regimes that took power after independence, used its authorities to exclude groups of people from the political scene, which hardened ethnic boundaries. Besides, the government army of these regimes regularly used violence against its own citizens (Acker van, 2004). Especially Idi Amin’s regime that overthrew Obote in 1971, indiscriminately tortured and killed just about anybody it considered to stand in its way. Acholi officers were among those most likely to be targeted because they were seen to have supported former President Obote (Quinn, 2009). Amin was overthrown in 1979, which brought Obote back to power. In 1985, he was removed from power for the second time by the Acholi military officer Tito Okello Lutwa (Nannyonjo, 2005). This time, both the political and military positions came in the hands of the Acholi (Doom & Vlassenroot, 1999).

The new Acholi dominated government was already overthrown in 1986 by the Ugandan National Resistance Army (the NRA), led by current President Yoweri Museveni (Blattman and Annan, 2010). Once in power, Museveni radically changed the composition of the armed forces; the Acholi were removed from power and supreme positions were given to the southerners (Doom & Vlassenroot, 1999). During this period, the NRA committed widespread human rights violations against the civilian population in the North (Nannyonjo, 2005; CSUCS, 2008b).

In response to Museveni’s actions, the Acholi leader Alice Lakwena created the Holy Spirit Movement that fought against the NRA. Lakwena – originally a traditional spiritual healer and medium – combined Acholi traditions of healing and cleansing and Christian beliefs to inspire her supporters. For a short time, the movement was successful; nevertheless it was overrun by the NRA in 1987 (Human Rights Watch, 2005; Vinci, 2005). The Lord’s Resistance Army followed quickly: the same year, Joseph Kony – an Acholi himself – founded a nongovernmental rebel force, which eventually would become known as the LRA.
3.2 The Civil War; Turning against Civilians

Kony’s original mission was to free the Acholi of Museveni’s regime and to install a government based on the Biblical Ten Commandments (Moy, 2006). He claimed to have inherited the spirits that possessed Lakwena and incorporated the Holy Spirit followers as well as other defeated soldiers into the LRA (Vinci, 2005). However, most LRA operations were unsuccessful because the army received considerably less support than the Holy Spirit Movement (Doom & Vlassenroot, 1999). Kony interpreted this reduced support as an indication that the Acholi had come to collaborate with Museveni’s regime. As a result, the LRA began to turn its violence upon Acholi civilians by killing and mutilating suspected government allies (HURIFO, 2002). After the government’s formation of civil defence militias in the early 1990s – made up of fellow Acholi – Kony and his followers came to believe that their people had betrayed them (Doom & Vlassenroot, 1999). Consequently, they started to attack more and more civilians in the Acholi districts of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader.

In 1994, the Sudanese government began supplying the LRA with weapons and equipment and allowed the LRA to establish its bases in Sudan (Vinci, 2005; Human Rights Watch, 2005). With view recruits left and no material resources, the LRA started looting homes and abducting children (Annan et al., 2009). The attacks on civilians increased even more after the government’s formation of internally displaced persons camps (IDP camps), since the LRA considered anyone living in these camps a government ally (Vinci, 2005; Human Rights Watch, 2005). The IDP camps were protected by local militias and the NRA – which by this time was renamed the UPDF – but the residents continued to be attacked by the LRA and were reportedly mistreated by UPDF soldiers as well (Moy, 2006).

The UPDF launched an offensive in March 2002 in southern Sudan, called “Operation Iron Fist”, with Sudanese government consent. As a result, the LRA fled back into Uganda, where it expanded its attacks, including in formerly less affected areas in the Lango and Teso sub-regions. It was during this time that LRA attacks reached its peak: it began with more wide-scale abductions, killings and looting, which caused numerous civilians to flee their homes (Human Rights Watch, 2005). The violence ranged from small attacks to major massacres (Vinck & Pham, 2009). The wide scale abduction practices led to approximately 40,000 children seeking safety each night, by commuting from their rural homes to larger towns, where they slept on verandas, bus parks, church grounds, in hospitals and any other places they could find. Parents sent these children to sleep in town, while they themselves stayed in the villages to guard their property (Moy, 2006; Human Rights Watch, 2003).
The Government of Uganda started “Operation Iron Fist II” in 2004, which has been more successful: military pressure from its armed forces caused most LRA fighters to retreat to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The Sudanese government started to reduce its support for the LRA from 2005, which forced the remaining rebels to flee to the DRC as well. Peace talks between the Ugandan government and the LRA – held in the Sudanese city called Juba – officially opened in July 2006 and a cessation-of-hostilities agreement was signed a month later (Human Rights Watch, 2005). However, the official peace agreement (the CPA) has never been signed, which is partly attributed to President Museveni’s referral of the case of the LRA to the International Criminal Court (Esuruku, 2012). As a result, the Court issued the arrest warrants for Joseph Kony and his four senior commanders in October 2005, for crimes against humanity and war crimes, including the war crime of forced conscription of children (Pham et al., 2008).

In Uganda, no violent incidents attributed to the LRA have been reported from mid-2006. Yet, at the time of writing, Kony has never been captured; he is still leading the LRA rebels, who, although no longer based in Uganda, continue to commit human rights abuse in neighbouring countries. Moreover, the human toll has been severe: tens of thousands of civilians died, while countless others became the victim of the LRAs brutal mutilation practices as a form of punishment, generally consisting of the cutting of body parts such as hands, feet, noses, ears, lips and/or breasts (Human Rights Watch, 2005; Vinci, 2005). In addition, due to a combination of the LRA’s abuses and the government’s forcible resettlement of people in IDP camps, nearly the entire population of the northern provinces had been displaced. According to Human Rights Watch (2012b), more than 1.9 million people were internally displaced at the end of the war, most of them located in one of the 218 IDP camps (Republic of Uganda, 2007). Around 1.1 million people were refugees from one of the three Acholi districts of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader; a number that represented 90 to 95 percent of these regions’ population (Human Rights Watch, 2012b). The war has particularly affected tens of thousands of children and youth, who were abducted by the LRA and transformed into (child) soldiers, either as combatants, or used for other ‘combat support roles’ (CSUCS, 2008b).

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28 Since 2008, the rebel force has supposedly killed more than 2.600 civilians and abducted more than 4,000 people - many of them children - in the border area of South Sudan, the Central African Republic (CAR) and the DRC. The LRA’s current political goals are unclear; Kony’s recent tactics seem purely aimed at ensuring his and other leaders’ survival (Human Rights Watch, 2012b).

29 In 2002, the government coerced people into IDP camps, claiming that depopulation of the northern provinces would allow the government to provide adequate protection from the LRA (Nannyonjo, 2005).
3.3 The LRA’s Abduction Practices and the Use of Child Soldiers

Before elaborating on the LRA’s abduction practices and the use of child soldiers, it is worth mentioning that minors have also been recruited and used by the UPDF. Although the Ugandan government has stated that it had never knowingly recruited a child, it admitted that age verification was difficult and that sometimes minors were recruited. Children who escaped, or were captured or released from the LRA, have reportedly been pressured to join the government forces to fight the LRA (CSUCS, 2008a). Nevertheless, these children are only a small fraction of the total number of children involved in the conflict; most of them were abducted by the LRA, where they were forced to commit, or at least witness, extreme human rights abuses.

The figures regarding the total number of LRA abductees are extremely wide-ranging: estimations vary between 25,000 to around 80,000 youth.30 Yet, some estimations also include people who have been abducted in their early, or even in their late twenties. Moreover, a relatively large proportion of the reported abductions are very short in length. It is estimated that nearly 11% of boys/men and 26% of girls/women have been abducted for just one or two days (Annan et al., 2006) and 52% of abductees are thought to be held in captivity for three months or less (Pham et al., 2008).

Due to the wide-ranging estimations, the various age limits used in the statistics, as well as the relatively large proportion of abductees who spent only a few days in captivity, it is unknown how many abductees would actually classify as (former) child soldiers. In other words, it is unclear how many under-18s have been recruited and used by the LRA, either in their armed forces or in combat support roles. Yet, as is seen in figure 2, adolescents between the age of 12 to 15 seem to be the most heavily targeted group. Where adults were often released after a few days and have predominately been used as porters, children could spend years in captivity and have been regularly used as combatants (Human Rights Watch, 2003 & 2012b).

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30 The UN estimated that at least 25,000 children have been abducted since 1986, a number comparable to the estimation cited in the reports of the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers. However, much higher estimations have also been made: Pham et al. (2008) estimated that the LRA abducted 54,000 to 75,000 people, including 25,000 to 38,000 children. Furthermore, Annan, Blattman & Horton (2006) concluded that even more children were involved; they estimated that between 60,000 and 80,000 youth have been abducted, although these numbers include people up to the age of 30. The Ugandan government claims that around 60,000 children (12,000 in 2004 alone) have been involved (Republic of Uganda, 2007).
A large percentage of former abductees are of the male sex; Pham et al. (2008) estimated that around 76% are boys/men, whereas 24% are girls/women. However, girls generally spent longer with the LRA than boys, as they regularly served as “wives” of commanders (CSUCS, 2008a). Pham et al. (2008) estimated that, on average, girls and women have been abducted for nearly two years (643 days), more than twice the average length (258 days) of abduction for boys and men.

Most children were abducted after 1996 from one of the Acholi districts of Gulu, Kitgum or Pader (Blattman & Annan, 2010). Abductions peaked in 2002 and 2003 after the failure of the government’s offensive “operation Iron Fist” (Annan et al., 2006). From this time onwards, children were also taken from the formerly less affected Lango and Teso sub-regions. Abductions decreased from 2005, with just over 200 reported cases for the first six months of 2006 (CSUCS, 2008a).

Children were typically taken by groups of ten to twenty LRA rebels during raids in rural areas. Once abducted, they were often forced to carry heavy loads and walk long distances. Many have also been exposed to extreme violence (CSUCS, 2008b). Blattman and Annan (2010) estimated that two-thirds of abductees have been forced to perpetrate a crime of violence and that about a third eventually became combatants, many of whom were under-18s. Sometimes as young as seven or eight years old, children underwent a ‘military’ training and, after a few months, received a gun. They were not only forced to kill government soldiers, but civilians and even family members as well, in order to bind them to the group, reduce their fear of killing and discourage disobedience (Blattman & Annan, 2010). In addition, they were forced to carry out raids, mutilate other soldiers and civilians and loot and burn houses. Moreover, many were severely mistreated during captivity, either as punishment.
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or when unable to keep up with their unit (Pham et al., 2008; CSUCS, 2008a). Sexual abuse has also been extremely widespread: many children (especially girls) were routinely raped and as a result, experienced unwanted pregnancies, childbirth and/or sexually transmitted diseases (CSUCS, 2008b).

Since 2006, after the LRA’s retreat into the DRC, peace has slowly returned in Northern Uganda (Human Rights Watch, 2012b). As a result, most surviving abductees have by now returned home. However, many either died in battle, have been killed by their abductors or have deceased from injury or illness (CSUCS, 2008a). Moreover, at the time of writing, some abductees still remain with the LRA, that is currently still active in Uganda’s neighbouring countries. In 2008, Pham et al. (2008) estimated that between 1,000 to 3,000 abductees were still part of the LRA, while in 2010, around 1,000 of them were thought to remain (Blattman & Annan, 2010).

3.4 Conclusion

The civil war in Northern Uganda (1986-2006) is believed to have resulted from deep historical roots, related to the socioeconomic marginalisation of the Acholi people created under British colonial rule and the militarization of politics during the postcolonial era. Although Joseph Kony’s initial intention was to free the Acholi from Museveni’s regime – which came into power in 1986 – he soon turned against his own people because he felt the Acholi had come to collaborate with the government. Massive human rights abuses followed, which lasted for almost two decades, mostly in the three Acholi districts of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader.

Kony’s Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) became notorious for its large-scale abduction practices as a method of forced conscription. During the course of the conflict, the rebel force ab ducted between 25,000 to 80,000 youth. Although is it unclear how many of these abductees can be classified as (former) child soldiers, the LRA predominantly targeted under-18s, with the aim of either using them in its armed forces or for combat support roles.

In 2006, peace slowly returned in Northern Uganda and most of the surviving abductees have by now returned home. However, the human toll has been severe: almost the entire population of the Northern provinces had been displaced. In addition, most of the returning abductees had been forced to commit, or at least witness extreme human rights abuses against their own family and/or community members, while they had also been severely mistreated themselves.
PART 2

FIELDWORK AND RESULTS
CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Data for this study have been obtained through a variety of qualitative research methods. As there is little research conducted on the long-term reintegration process of former child soldiers, this study has been designed to be explorative in nature. Therefore, a qualitative research design – a design “with the purpose of developing deep understanding, and capturing everyday life and human perspectives” (Trumbull, 2000: 101) – was found most appropriate. First, qualitative research allows the researcher to detect those issues which are particularly important to the respondents since it aims to “interpreting the social world from the perspective of the people being studied” (Bryman 2004: 20). Second, qualitative research is found suitable when studying the development of events and patterns over time (Bryman, 2004). This is essential when approaching reintegration of former child soldiers as a long-term process, which, in Uganda, started many years ago and is still ongoing at the time of writing.

4.1 Research Period and Fieldwork Areas

Fieldwork was conducted during a period of two months, from July 19th 2013 until September 20th 2013, in various regions of Uganda. As described in chapter 2, the reintegration process of former (child) soldiers is generally influenced by the larger social, political and economic context in which reintegration takes place. Therefore, significant contextual elements have been taken into account when selecting the research areas: in the three Acholi districts of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader, over 90% of the civilian population was internally displaced at the end of the war, while in the less affected areas of the Lango and Teso sub-regions, this percentage was much less (Human Rights Watch, 2005 & 2012). Hence, abductees returning to the heavily affected Acholi districts, had a higher chance of ending up in an IDP camp, before they were able to return to their original homes. On the other hand, these abductees have been more likely to receive some form of assistance from aid agencies since most (inter)national NGOs are located in these regions, mostly clustered in and around Gulu town (Human Rights Watch, 2005).

To ensure that the respondents would have a good spread over relevant subgroups in the population, research has been conducted in both the heavily affected Acholi districts of Gulu and Pader, as well as in the district of Lira – located in the Lango sub-region – which was affected only
Chapter 4: Methodology

during the later stages of the war. In Gulu district, fieldwork has mostly been conducted in Gulu town, as most (inter)national NGOs are located in this city. Other areas of this district – Pabbo town and Koch Goma Sub county, which were the locations of large IDP camps throughout the war – have also been included. Two former LRA child soldiers have been interviewed in Kampala, the capital city of Uganda, which is located in the Southern part of the country. Although the civil war never extended to this city, some former abductees – originally from Northern Uganda – migrated to this town, either because they saw no possibility of returning to their home area, or because they tried to improve their living conditions (Makerere University, 2010). These two respondents have both lived in Northern Uganda for a number of years upon their return from the LRA, before they migrated to Kampala. Hence, their (initial) reintegration process has largely taken place in the Northern region.

4.2 Respondents

In total, 35 interviews have been conducted with former LRA abductees, representatives of (inter)national NGOs as well as other actors who have been involved in the reintegration process of those returning from the LRA. These interviews are supplemented by numerous informal conversations with various people in Northern Uganda, who provided important background information about the war and the current state of this region. Especially in the heavily affected Acholi districts of Gulu and Pader, countless community members (mostly victims of the war), as well as family members of former abductees, were willing to share their personal experiences, thoughts and concerns related to (the aftermath of) the war and the LRA’s widespread abduction practices.

Table 1: Interviews per research area

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Areas</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Districts</strong></td>
<td><strong>Town/Village</strong></td>
<td><strong>Former Abductees (FA)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kampala</td>
<td>Kampala</td>
<td>FA 1 &amp; 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gulu</td>
<td>Gulu</td>
<td>FA 3 &amp; 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amuru * (Gulu)</td>
<td>Pabbo</td>
<td>FA 5,6,7 &amp; 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nwoya * (Gulu)</td>
<td>Koch Goma</td>
<td>FA 9, 10 &amp; 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pader</td>
<td>Patongo</td>
<td>FA 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lira</td>
<td>Lira</td>
<td>FA 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 &amp; 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*During the war, these areas were still part of Gulu district. Nowadays, Gulu district has been divided in multiple, smaller districts.
4.2.1 LRA abductees and former child soldiers

As described in chapter 3, not all LRA abductees can be classified as (former) child soldiers. Therefore, the definition of a child soldier as documented in the Paris Principles,\(^{31}\) has been used to examine if the respondents could indeed be classified as such. Based on this definition, respondents (1) had to be under-18 at the time of their abduction and (2) either had to take direct part in hostilities or in a broader range of activities related to "combat support roles", while being held in captivity.\(^{32}\)

When trying to examine the first criteria during the interviews, it became clear that some respondents could not remember their exact age at the time of their abduction. Nevertheless, these respondents could all confirm they had at least been under-18, as they could remember important life events prior to their abduction, from which they could roughly trace back their age (for example in which year of school they were enrolled in). As is seen in table 2, one respondent stated he was above 18 at the time of his abduction. Therefore, he could not be classified as a former child soldier.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: age and sex of former abductees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age at time of abduction</th>
<th>Age &lt; 10</th>
<th>Age 10-13</th>
<th>Age 14-17</th>
<th>Age 18 or older</th>
<th>Unknown, But &lt; 18</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second criteria – one either had to take direct part in hostilities or in a broader range of activities related to combat support roles – has also been examined. Both the length of abduction and at least a basic description of the respondents’ duties while being held in captivity have been discussed throughout the interviews. All but one of the respondents had been abducted for at least two months and these respondents all mentioned that, after their abduction, they were immediately used by the LRA as porters. Moreover, most respondents were forced to participate in other activities as well; mostly in the LRA’s armed forces and/or for sexual slavery. One respondent, who was captured by the government troops after spending six days in captivity, had not been used in hostilities or for combat support roles.

\(^{31}\) See chapter 2 for more information.

\(^{32}\) Based on the definition as described in the Paris Principles, these activities, besides the actual fighting, "include, but are not limited to children used as cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes".
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Table 3: Time spent in abduction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time spent in abduction</th>
<th>&lt; 1 month</th>
<th>2 – 4 month</th>
<th>5 month -1 year</th>
<th>1 year -2 year</th>
<th>&gt; 2 years</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consequently, two out of the 18 respondents cannot be classified as former child soldiers; one respondent was above 18 at the time of his abduction and the other had not been used in combat or for combat support roles while being held in captivity. Data stemming from these interviews have not been used in the analyses of long-term reintegration of former LRA child soldiers; it has merely been used as background information.

Besides examining the respondents’ status as former child soldiers, the year of their return has also been taken into consideration. The aim of this study is to analyse the long-term reintegration process and outcome of former LRA child soldiers. Therefore, it was important that the respondents had gone through the short-term reintegration processes of reunification and reinsertion as described in chapter 2, for a considerable amount of time. The most recent return mentioned by the respondents was in 2011, followed by a return in 2010. For the aim of this research, these relatively recent returns were found suitable for analysing long-term reintegration since these respondents had been reunited with their families and reinserted into the community for well over a year.

Table 4: Year of return from the LRA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.2 (Inter)national NGOs and other local organisations

In addition to the above-mentioned respondents, representatives of nine (inter)national NGOs and other local organisations have been interviewed. These organisations have all been involved in the reintegration process of former LRA child soldiers and most are still involved in this process at the time of writing. These representatives could all provide essential information on the role of aid agencies in relation to reintegration of former LRA abductees, both during and after the war. In addition, questions were asked on the current activities of these organisations in post-conflict Northern Uganda.
Three organisations mainly focused on advocacy, mediation and research activities in post-conflict Northern Uganda. One of these organisations had also been involved in the Juba peace talks at the end of the war. Two organisations have been directly involved in reintegration of former LRA child soldiers: they established rehabilitation centres where returning abductees could be located for a certain amount of time, before they were reunited with their families and reinserted into the community.\footnote{See chapter 5 for more information on these rehabilitation centres.} The remaining organisations have been involved in a broad range of activities, ranging from social work to psychological support, reconciliation and education (or a combination of these activities).

4.2.3 Other actors in the field
Interviews have also been conducted with other actors, who have either been involved in the reintegration process of former LRA child soldiers, or have a specific knowledge about this process, stemming from their profession or personal experiences. These actors include a journalist, a schoolteacher and a representative of the Amnesty Commission; the main body overseeing the Ugandan Amnesty Act.\footnote{See chapter 5 for more information on the Amnesty Act.} In addition, interviews have been held with a chairman of a traditional Acholi cleansing and reconciliation ceremony,\footnote{See chapter 6 for more information on this cleansing and reconciliatory ceremony.} as well as with family members of former abductees and victims of the war. Lastly, a boy who has been born in captivity and spent the early years of his life amongst the LRA rebels, has also been interviewed.

4.3 Sampling
The main sampling method used throughout this research is the snowball technique, as this method is found suitable for studying a population with an unknown sampling frame and / or a population that is somehow stigmatized (Bijleveld, 2006); a population like former child soldiers. When applying this method, the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to his or her research. Those people will then be used to establish contacts with others, by asking them if they know other members of the population who are willing to be interviewed as well (Bijleveld, 2013; Bryman, 2004).

Before going into the field, a first respondent – a former LRA child soldier – was contacted through a Dutch student who conducted research in Uganda a year prior. After arrival in Kampala, an interview was arranged and this respondent eventually became a key informant; meaning that he directed the researcher to situations and other respondents who were helpful to the progress of this research
(Bryman, 2004). Through other contacts, an additional interview with a former child soldier in Gulu town could be organised. Based on these initial contacts, the snowball technique – through which most interviews with former abductees have been established – could be applied.

With the help of the director of a local grassroots organisation in Lira town, interviews with former LRA child soldiers could also be arranged in this less affected area of Uganda. However, applying the snowball technique – hoping to find respondents outside the scope of his organisation – proved unsuccessful, as former abductees in Lira area were found more reluctant to speak about their past, compared to those in Gulu area. As a consequence, the interviews conducted in Lira, closely resemble a convenience sample: a sample that is simply available to the researcher by virtue of its accessibility (Bijleveld, 2013). This type of sample offers no perspective on representativeness. Yet, as this study has been designed to be explorative in nature, the issue of representativeness can be considered less important (Bijleveld, 2013).

4.3.1 Approaching organisations

In the early stages of this research, before and upon arrival in Uganda, professionals and / or representatives of (inter)national NGOs, were approached by email. Experience soon learned that this method is not effective: it often took a long time before contact was established and in some instances, no response was given at all. In addition, some organisations – especially local organisations – do not have their own website.

After spending some time in Uganda and amongst Ugandan people, it became clear that an informal approach would be more effective. African culture often goes hand in hand with informal (mostly oral) interactions (Abdi, 2007). As a result, many community members either knew, or were able to contact, representatives of key organisations involved in the reintegration process of former abductees. Most organisations have eventually been approached through the help of local residents, who could introduce the researcher to the right people. Of all the organisations approached, two refused to participate in this research: one claimed to be short on time and resources, while the other stated that it is being approached by researchers on a regular basis and therefore was unable to participate in this study.
4.4 Research Methods

With most respondents, one in-depth interview has been conducted which, on average, lasted about an hour to an hour and a half. With one former child soldier (the key respondent) as well as the director of the grassroots organisation in Lira town, the researcher was able to build a more in-depth relationship, leading to several meetings and conversations.

4.4.1 Unstructured interviews

The interviews were unstructured in nature. When conducting unstructured interviews, aspects of people’s social world that are of specific significance for them, but that might not have crossed the mind of a researcher, are more likely to be exposed. As a result, the likelihood of genuinely revealing the perspective of the respondents, will be enhanced (Bryman 2004; Trumbull, 2000).

Before starting an interview with a former abductee, it was emphasized that the researcher did not belong to any organisation or could offer practical assistance or financial support, to avoid raising unrealistic expectations or double agendas amongst the respondents. Furthermore, respondents were asked to give informed consent for participating in this research. When asking for their consent, their anonymity was ensured, by mentioning that their identities would not be exposed. During the interviews, open questions were asked about the respondents’ history as a child soldier as well as (the four components of) his or her reintegration process within post-conflict Northern Uganda. No interview guide or topic list has been used (except in preparation of the interviews), to rule out the possibility that this would prevent genuine access to the views and perspectives of the respondents.

When conducting an interview with a professional, a topic list was used, which brought a little more structure into these interviews. By doing so, it was aimed to collect more ‘factual’ information related to the professional assistance provided to former abductees, both during and after the war. However, even during these interviews, open questions were asked, leaving room for the interviewees to share their own experiences, thoughts and opinions.

During the interviews, recording device has not been used as this may obstruct discussing potentially sensitive topics, or make respondents self-conscious or alarmed because their words will be preserved (Bryman, 2004). Instead, the interviews (and sometimes informal conversations or observations) were recorded into field notes. Transcription ideally took place immediately after an interview had been conducted.
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Many interviews took place without the help of a translator, as many inhabitants of (Northern) Uganda are able to speak at least a basic level of English.\textsuperscript{36} This is one of the reasons why this particular country was selected as a case study for this research. However, not all Ugandan residents are familiar with the English language, as the various tribes living in this country also speak their own local languages. Some interviews have therefore been conducted with the help of a translator. Especially when conducting interviews in remote rural areas, or with former abductees who have been unable to attend (secondary) schooling, the help of a translator was generally found necessary. None of the people who translated were professional interpreters. In Gulu area, a personal acquaintance – who also connected the researcher to several representatives of NGOs – was willing to translate during various interviews. In the district of Lira, the social workers of the local grassroots organisation where the interviews have been conducted, helped translating.

4.4.2 Observation

In addition to conducting interviews, the method of observation – a form of data collection whereby people are studied and observed within their natural environment (Baker, 2006) – has been regularly applied. A large amount of time has been spent amongst the people under study, which made it possible to observe, and to some extent experience, their way of living. Visits were made to respondents’ houses, their neighbourhoods and / or villages, as well as to several schools and former IDP camps, which gave additional insights into their lives outside an interview setting. It also provided the researcher with the opportunity to have numerous informal conversations with all kinds of people who were somehow relevant to this research.

A four-day visit to the key informant’s home village in Pader district, provided important background information about life during and after the war. Throughout the visit, many villagers shared their stories about the LRA’s brutal abduction and killing practices, as well as life in IDP camps and their current way of living in post-conflict Northern Uganda. Moreover, observing and experiencing village life in Uganda – by spending time with these villagers for a longer period of time – made it possible to place the stories of respondents in a broader context.

In Lira, multiple visits have been made to the local grassroots organisation that is providing psychosocial support to former LRA child soldiers and other war-affected children and young adults. Spending time with these young individuals and obtaining information on their life stories, definitely

\textsuperscript{36} English is an official language in Uganda, stemming from British colonial rule.
added to the knowledge on the different aspects of reintegration and the current struggles former LRA child soldiers are confronted with.

4.4.3 Triangulation

The use of more than one research method – triangulation – results in a greater confidence in findings: data obtained through a certain research strategy can be compared and cross-checked with the results of other methods (Bryman, 2004; Bijleveld, 2006). Hence, the combination of conducting interviews, observing the respondents’ way of living and having numerous informal conversations with various kinds of people, served as a way to verify the data. In addition, a local symposium on transitional justice has been attended, where numerous experts have been consulted, factual information about the (aftermath of the) war could be verified, and additional (local) literature related to the research topic, could be obtained.

Triangulation also implies using as many sources as possible, which will make data become increasingly more objective and reliable (Bijleveld, 2006). Therefore, interviewing a wide range of actors – with diverse backgrounds and expertise (see paragraph 4.2) – not only helped cover all topics related to this research; it has also been an essential strategy to compare the data and to test its reliability. On multiple occasions, experts and professionals proved to be a good source to cross-check information obtained through former abductees and/or their families. For example, it was questionable whether a respondent, who described the LRA’s brutal slaughtering of his parents in great detail, might have had exaggerated his story a little bit? However, several professionals later confirmed that in the particular (apparently well-known) mass killing in which the respondent’s parents had been slaughtered, the brutalities he had been describing, indeed took place.

4.5 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Research Design

The qualitative nature of this study proved very suitable in fulfilling the aim of this explorative research: to develop a deep understanding of, and create in-depth knowledge on, the long-term reintegration process of former LRA child soldiers in post-conflict Northern Uganda. The open nature of the research design made it possible for the people under study to tell their own story and emphasize those issues most important to them.

The design of this study also has its downsides: its explorative nature, the sampling method and the relatively small sample size, limits the generalizability of the results to a larger population or across social settings (Bijleveld, 2013; Bryman, 2004). Yet, the aim of this study was not to produce generalizable data, but to delve deep into the situation of former LRA child soldiers and to unravel
the mechanisms that underline reintegration in post-conflict Northern Uganda. Moreover, by ensuring that the sample has a good spread over relevant subgroups in the population, the findings of this study are made as generalizable as possible: respondents, both male and female, are interviewed in various research areas, in urban as well as rural settings. In addition, both former abductees who went straight home upon their return from the LRA, as well as those who passed through the formal reintegration process and/or lived in an IDP camp before they returned to their original home, are included in the sample.

Secondly, data may be biased due to cultural differences (Bryman, 2004). For instance, as Ugandan people are very hospitable and often live in large communities, it has sometimes been a challenge to speak to respondents in private. Especially in the remote rural areas of Northern Uganda, being a Western visitor attracts many people who want to meet their ‘special guest’. This regularly resulted in curious community members interrupting while conducting an interview. Yet, when trying to discuss sensitive topics like stigmatization, it was extremely important to talk to the respondents in a secluded environment, where they would feel comfortable enough to discuss these matters. The issue of interruption has generally been dealt with, by taking the time to properly meet the residents of a specific research setting, before conducting an interview. On other occasions, respondents have been interviewed at other locations; either in a secluded space in the garden of the hotel where the researcher was located, or at a third location as indicated by the respondents themselves.

Conducting an interview with the help of a translator, brought about additional challenges. Experience learned that it was much harder to conduct an in-depth interview through the words of an interpreter. On multiple occasions, respondents repeatedly gave short answers to the questions (even when asking open questions), instead of having a ‘real’ conversation. In most instances, the situation improved throughout the interview, when respondents were starting to feel more comfortable. However, on average, the interviews conducted with the help of a translator, are shorter (half an hour/an hour) than the ones conducted without the help of a third party (an hour/two hours).

A last point worth mentioning when critically reflecting upon the research design, is the fact that government officials are hardly included in the sample. Various respondents have indicated that certain (in)actions of the Museveni government have (negatively) influenced reintegration of former

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37 See Bryman (2004) for more information on the issues that have to be taken into consideration when conducting interviews with the help of a translator.

38 One interview has been conducted with a representative of the Amnesty Commission – a body of the Ugandan government – responsible for overseeing the Amnesty Act.
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abductees. Yet, as the level of corruption in Uganda is high, it was found risky to approach government bodies: the continuance of this research could be jeopardized if officials would discover that research was being conducted on the government’s role related to the (aftermath of) the war. Moreover, the chances of receiving unbiased answers from government officials who are part of a system that is considered highly corrupt, is extremely unlikely. Consequently, their perspective could not be incorporated into the results of this study.

4.6 Research Ethics

Every researcher will be confronted with certain ethical dilemmas while being in the field. Conducting fieldwork in a country that is recovering from a devastating war, brings about additional challenges. Not only do cultural differences have to be taken into account (Bryman, 2004); the sensitivity of specific research topics and the possibility that the people under study might be severely affected by the war, raises further ethical concerns (Bijleveld, 2013).

Interviewing traumatized people might put them under severe stress or can even cause (additional) psychological problems (Bijleveld, 2013). The risk of causing (additional) mental harm amongst the interviewees has been minimized by avoiding to ask questions related to traumatizing events. The aim of this study – to examine long-term reintegration – allowed the researcher to only ask some basic questions about the respondents’ abductions and time spent with the LRA (see paragraph 4.2.1). During the interviews, it was always emphasized that respondents should not feel pressured to discuss any details about this dark period of their lives. Hence, the researcher only elaborated on issues related to abduction and captivity, if a respondent had indicated a willingness to speak up.

However, discussing sensitive issues related to reintegration (for example stigmatization or raising a child who has been born as a result from sexual abuse), was unavoidable. When discussing these issues, it was sometimes difficult to determine whether the answers of respondents were entirely frank: they might be too ashamed, or even afraid to tell the complete truth. The opposite might also be possible: respondents sometimes transform information, or even tell a fake story because they hope that portraying themselves as a victim, will somehow benefit them (Bryman, 2004). As discussed in paragraph 4.4.3, triangulation was a way to minimize this problem.

Lastly, by participating in this study, respondents might have been at risk of facing (additional) stigmatization or reprisals by community members, since their status as former LRA rebels could be

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39 See chapter 5 for more information.
40 See chapter 5 for more information.
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exposed to the outside world. One respondent even expressed these concerns; he was worried that members of his community would harass him if they would discover that he had been participating in this research. This risk has been minimized by granting respondents anonymity: their identities are not revealed throughout this research, neither was any form of data collection shared with persons uninvolved in this study. In addition, when a respondent requested to be interviewed at a private location – out of sight of his community members – this request was allowed by conducting the interview in a secluded environment as described in paragraph 4.6.
Addressing the aftermath of the war and the question of how to deal with the massive number of returning abductedees, has proved to be an enormous challenge in Northern Uganda. During the two decades of warfare, the relationship between the LRA and local communities became extremely complex, as about 90% of the rebels were abducted children and youth of these communities (Veale & Stavrou, 2011). Abductees became part of the LRA and in many instances participated in extreme human rights abuses, but at the same time, they remained someone’s son or daughter, brother or sister, niece or nephew. As a result, they were seen as perpetrators of horrific crimes by some, while others thought of them as loving family members who became victims of the brutal war themselves (RLP, 2004).

As described in chapter 2, former (child) soldiers and their societies have often been considerably transformed by wars, especially in countries like Uganda where the conflict has lasted for an extremely long period of time (Kingma, 2004). Many returnees were forced to reintegrate in a society that was still caught up in violence, as most returned home before the end of the war, typically by escaping the LRA in an unsupervised moment (CSUCS, 2008a).

In addition, due to the relocation of almost the entire population of the Northern region into IDP camps, they often returned to environments that were fundamentally different than those previously familiar to them (Veale & Stavrou, 2011).

5.1 Reintegration Assistance upon Return
In the absence of an official DDR operation, (inter)national NGOs and other organisations established a number of rehabilitation centres since the mid-1990s, to respond to the needs of returning abductedees. These centres have also benefitted adult returnees, although they have generally been

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41 Annan et al. (2009) estimated that around 80% of all returnees have escaped the LRA, 15% of this group have been captured by government troops and only a mere 5% was released from the LRA.
42 Twelve formal centres have been established, the biggest being the ones run by World Vision in various regions in Northern Uganda, Gulu Support the Children (GUSCO) in Gulu and Rachele Rehabilitation Centre in Lira (CSUCS, 2008a; Pham et al., 2008). Together, World Vision and GUSCO are said to have received at least 25,000 returnees (NGO 4; NGO 7).
designed to assist former child soldiers. Religious and/or community leaders also initiated several projects, as a response to the conflict and the large-scale abduction practices. Family and community members made efforts to receive those returning from the LRA, mostly through practices of (traditional) cleansing and reconciliation ceremonies. In contrast, the government’s role in the returning process of abductees has been modest (Blattman & Annan, 2008), although it did promote various sensitization campaigns to encourage (LRA) rebels to lay down their arms and return home. Moreover, in 2000, it endorsed an official Amnesty Act, which states that all returnees who have engaged in rebellion against the government will be granted amnesty, if they renounce their involvement in rebel activities (Amnesty Commission, 2009).

The formal reintegration process consisted of reporting at, or being taken to, the government’s UPDF army barracks or child protection unit, before being transferred to one of the rehabilitation centres. One could also report to the Amnesty Commission – the main body overseeing the Amnesty Act – to obtain an amnesty certificate (CSUCS, 2008a; Annan et al., 2009). However, it is estimated that only half of the returning child soldiers – or even fewer – registered for demobilization with the UPDF, either because they feared the government army, or because they tried to avoid being registered as a (former) LRA rebel (Blattman & Annan, 2008; CSUCS, 2008a). Those who did not register with the UPDF could not take part in the formal reintegration process, but went directly home to their families instead (Annan et al., 2006). Consequently, about half of all former LRA child soldiers have not (or hardly) received professional assistance upon their return, neither have they been granted formal amnesty (Blattman & Annan, 2008; CSUCS, 2008a).

Those who passed through the formal reintegration process were, on average, placed in a rehabilitation centre for four weeks to four months (Pham et al., 2008; CSUCS, 2008b). Upon arrival, they were provided with basic needs like food and clothes. They often received medical treatment as well, as many returned in poor physical condition due to injuries, beatings, carrying heavy loads, walking long distances and / or sexual abuse. However, the rehabilitation centres

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43 Pham et al. (2008) estimated that about 24% of those returning, were between nineteen to thirty years old. Although the rehabilitation centres strongly focussed on assisting minors, their programmes have also benefitted adult returnees, as a strict age limit was not applied when receiving those returning from the LRA (NGO 4; NGO 7; FA 8). What is more, World Vision established a centre that has been specifically designed to assist adult returnees (NGO 7).
44 An example is the Acholi Religious Leaders’ Peace Initiative (ARLPI), founded in 1997, which is still operational at the time of writing.
45 The only exceptions being Joseph Kony and his four senior commanders, who have been indicted by the ICC and therefore cannot obtain formal amnesty through the Ugandan Amnesty Act (Moy, 2006).
46 NGO 6; OA 4.
47 OA 4.
48 NGO 4; NGO 7.
received limited funding for medical services, which negatively influenced the quality of medical care (CSUCS, 2008b). Transportation to (nearby) hospitals could sometimes be arranged, where long time medical care was provided to those with the most severe injuries or illnesses.49 Most centres offered additional services such as recreational activities, counselling, psychosocial support or training or schooling programmes. These services varied widely; some centres focussed on social cultural interventions while others concentrated on psychological assistance (Pham et al., 2008; CSUCS, 2008a).50

Nevertheless, all centres specifically focussed on family tracing, as former child soldiers could only be accommodated for a short period of time, due to the overwhelming amount of returnees who needed to be placed.51 The length of stay in the centres has been largely dependent on the time it took to trace one’s family and less on the actual needs of the individual returnees (CSUCS, 2008b). While former child soldiers were at the centres, efforts were made to prepare their families and communities for their return. In those instances where children could not be reunited with their families, relocations to children’s homes or other shelters were arranged.52 Hence, the reintegration programmes in Northern Uganda have also largely focused on the short-term processes of the social component of reintegration: reunification with the family and reinsertion into the community (Blattman & Annan, 2008).

Many former child soldiers struggled heavily to rebuild their life in the civilian world, as most were – on many levels – unprepared to return to their community. As documented by various NGOs as well as academics, returnees experienced difficulties related to all four components of reintegration as described in chapter 2, regardless of whether they passed through the formal reintegration process or not.53 Many returnees had yet to recover from their traumatic experiences and either lacked the (basic) farming skills which made it difficult to earn a living, or the necessary funding to (re)start their education. Community members also struggled with their return, resulting in fear, stigmatization or rejection of former abductees.54

49 NGO 4; NGO 7; FA 4.
50 NGO 4; NGO 7.
51 NGO 4; NGO 7.
52 NGO 4.
53 See inter alia: Acker van, 2004; Akello et al., 2006; Annan et al., 2006; Annan et al., 2009; Blattman & Annan, 2008&2010; Branch, 2007; Corbin, 2008; Maina, 2009a&b; Okello et al., 2007; Pfeiffer & Elbert, 2011; Pham et al., 2008 & 2009; Veale & Stavrou, 2011; Vinck & Pham, 2009. See also the reports of Human Rights Watch 2003&2005; CSUCS 2008b; Refugee Law Project, 2005; JRP, 2012b.
54 NGO 1; NGO 2; NGO 4; NGO 5; NGO 7; NGO 8; NGO 9; FA 3; FA 4; FA 5; FA 6; FA 11; FA 13; FA 15.
The number of returning abductees decreased substantially from 2005 onwards and by the time the LRA retreated into the DRC in 2007, many rehabilitation centres were almost empty (CSUCS, 2008a). As a result, most facilities have by now been closed. Two centres are still operating at the time of writing, as, up until today, people are still returning from the LRA, that is currently active in Uganda’s neighbouring countries.

5.2 The Context of Reintegration in Northern Uganda

Once reinserted into the community, reintegration becomes an ongoing process full of challenges, partly related to the social, economic and political context of Northern Uganda; an area deeply affected by two decades of war (Annan et al., 2009). Although security has improved over the years (Human Rights Watch, 2012b), issues like long-term displacement, poverty, trauma, weak institutions and instable governmental rule, have all influenced the reintegration process of former abductees. Consequently, they not only have to deal with their individual struggles and (psychological) healing, but equally face the challenges related to the aftermath of the war.

5.2.1 Trauma and social and cultural disruption

The long-lasting conflict situation and the government’s forced displacement of almost the entire population of Northern Uganda from 2002 onwards, is said to have led to a severely traumatized society and a breakdown of social and cultural values amongst the war-affected communities (Maina, 2009b; Nannyonjo, 2005; RLP, 2004). The inhabitants of the IDP camps became entirely dependent on relief aid, due to the devastating living conditions as well as the restricted movement of the people within these camps (RLP, 2004; Branch, 2009). Moreover, as the government soldiers largely failed to protect the camps, IDPs remained easy targets for the LRA (RLP, 2004).

The disturbing circumstances in the camps eventually resulted in increased crime rates, high rates of alcohol consumption and a lack of respect for traditional values and responsibilities amongst the camp inhabitants (Nannyonjo, 2005; Esuruku, 2012). Many abductees who returned from the LRA were confronted with this disturbance in social values and order, as many ended up in an IDP camp – often the camp where their family had been traced – before they were able to return to their original homes (Annan et al., 2009). Especially returnees belonging to the heavily affected Acholi districts of

55 NGO 4; NGO 7.
56 Pfeiffer & Elbert (2011) concluded in their research that the majority of IDPs in Northern Uganda, has suffered or witnessed at least one, but often several, traumatic experiences.
57 FA1; FA 5; FA 6; FA 7; FA 8; FA 11; FA 12; FA 15.
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Gulu, Kitgum and Pader, had a high chance of becoming an IDP for a long period of time.\(^{58}\)

It was not until December 2010 when a first official document – issued by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (the UNHCR) – indicated that nearly all IDP camps had been abolished (Esuruku, 2012). Although the camps formally do not exist anymore, many people have settled permanently in these places, as not everybody has been able or willing to return to their original homes.\(^{59}\) As a result, over the years, some former IDP camps have been transformed into (small) towns of their own.\(^{60}\)

The people who returned to their original villages, as well as those who settled elsewhere or stayed behind in former IDP camps, struggle heavily to (re)create a unified community. Numerous families have become broken families, either headed by divorcees, widows or widowers, or even orphaned children (Esuruku, 2012). More importantly, individuals within these communities have been socialized differently and have formed new identities, as they have been in different environments – where people with diverse cultural backgrounds were mixed together – for a long period of time (Maina, 2009b; Veale & Stavrou, 2011). As a result, many Northerners feel that the camps “broke the social ties and destroyed the cultural inheritance of the Northern communities”.\(^{61}\) These changes in social and cultural values of the (newly formed) communities, influence reintegration of former LRA child soldiers, as reintegration in a community where different members have different value systems, is not an easy task (Maina, 2009b).

5.2.2 Poverty and instable governmental rule

Another issue complicating the reintegration process of former LRA child soldiers, is the fact that Northern Uganda is still economically and politically marginalized compared to the rest of the country. Although the economic division between the North and the South has already been created during British colonial rule,\(^{62}\) the two decades of warfare have led to an even further deterioration, seen in a destruction of infrastructure and downfall of economic activity (RLP, 2004). Meaningful livelihood opportunities for communities are scarce, and access to basic services such as water and sanitation, health facilities, education and an effective police force is poor compared to national

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\(^{58}\) By July 2007, more than 90% of the IDPs in Teso and Lango regions had returned to their homes, while in the Acholi districts, about 75% of IDPs still remained in the camps (Esuruku, 2012). By late 2008, after nearly three years without combat, an estimated 38% of IDPs were still in the camps (Vinck & Pham, 2009).

\(^{59}\) NGO 8; OA 2; FA 5; FA 6; FA 7; FA 8.

\(^{60}\) An example is Pabbo town, located in Amuru District (former Gulu district), which was one of the larger IDP camps throughout the war.

\(^{61}\) OA 2; OA 5; OA 6; NGO 1; NGO 2; NGO 3; NGO 8.

\(^{62}\) See chapter 3 for more information.
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standards (Republic of Uganda, 2007; Nannyonjo, 2005; Esuruku, 2012). Consequently, as is documented in the most recent Ugandan National Household Survey, Northern Uganda is still the poorest region in the country (UBOS, 2013). The poverty headcount remains higher than the national average (UBOS, 2013) and the income per capita of the northern region is only a mere 27% of the national average (Esuruku, 2012).

Figure 3: Proportion of poor persons in Uganda by region, %. Source: UBOS, 2013: 118.

The government of Uganda – with the help of donor support – has implemented a number of programmes since the early 1990s to stabilize the northern region and to try to improve the livelihoods of the war-affected communities (Esuruku, 2012). The most recently implemented programme is the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP), that was launched in September 2007 and is currently still operational (Republic of Uganda, 2007 & 2011). The PRDP, which is a framework for post-conflict recovery, combines both reparation measures and development interventions, with the overall goal to stabilize the Northern regions. It also aims to stimulating socio-economic development to bridge the gap between the North and the rest of the country (Esuruku, 2012).

Although the PRDP is promoted as “a strategy to eradicate poverty and improve the welfare of the populace in Northern Uganda” (Republic of Uganda, 2007: iii), its current impact – almost seven years after its official launch – seems minimal. The plan and its implementation have been criticised by many – including the Northerners themselves – due to issues of inadequate funding and the risk

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63 NGO 3; Symposium on transitional justice, organised by the Refugee Law Project, attended August 16th 2013 in Gulu, Uganda.
64 NGO 2; NGO 3; NGO 6; NGO 8; Symposium on transitional justice, see supra note 63.
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of corruption (Esuruku, 2012). As a result, the PRDP is generally perceived as a tool for satisfying the government’s political agenda, rather than stimulating recovery and development in the North (Esuruku, 2012). Although transparent evaluations are lacking — leaving it largely unclear to what extent genuine investments into Northern Uganda have actually been made — only a small proportion of the PRDP’s budget seem to have been spent on its original goals. Consequently, the securing of sustainable livelihoods for former LRA child soldiers, as well as other members of the war-ravaged communities, has remained a largely unfulfilled objective.

5.2.3 The lack of coherent transitional justice mechanisms

A last point worth mentioning when discussing the context of reintegration in Northern Uganda, are the constant challenges how to deal with issues like justice, accountability and reconciliation in the aftermath of the war that has left so many people victimized. As a response to dealing with these challenges, the government of Uganda has moved towards the development of a comprehensive transitional justice (TJ) agenda. In mid-2013, it released a draft version of its future TJ policy. However, it is currently still unclear when it will be implemented in practice and whether it must be seen as a genuine effort towards peacebuilding and recovery, or merely as another tool for satisfying the government’s own agenda.

In the meantime, community-focused TJ mechanisms are still to be realized. The Amnesty Act grants pardon to all ex-combatants upon their denouncing of rebellion, but has not dealt with the longer-term demands of justice (Amnesty Commission, 2009; JRP, 2012a). On the one hand, the Amnesty Act, commonly known as “an act of forgiveness”, does represent a contextual approach to ending violence, as the initiative for creating an amnesty law came from the northern communities (Amnesty Commission, 2009; RLP, 2005; JRP, 2012b). In both the Acholi and the Lango and Teso regions, traditional reconciliatory rituals are mostly aimed at restoring relationships, rather than

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65 The Corruption Perceptions Index 2013, which measures the perceived levels of public sector corruption in 177 countries and territories, marked Uganda with a mere score of 26, on a scale from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). This score places Uganda somewhere on the bottom of the list (number 140 out of 177), number 1 being the least corrupt and 177 being the most corrupt (http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2013/results/, retrieved: February 20th 2014).

66 NGO 8; Symposium on transitional justice, see supra note 63.

67 In the original PRDP framework, investments over the first three year period were estimated at UGX 1.091.734.169 which at the time represented 606.519.297 US Dollars (Republic of Uganda, 2007).

68 NGO 2; NGO 3; NGO 6; NGO 8; Symposium on transitional justice, see supra note 63.

69 Transitional justice revers to judicial and non-judicial measures — related to the four main processes of truth telling, accountability, reconciliation and reparation — that can be implemented in order to redress large-scale human rights abuses in a post-conflict society (Smeulers & Grünfeld, 2011).

70 NGO 2; NGO 6; Symposium on transitional justice, see supra note 63.

71 About 28.000 ex-combatants (consisting of former LRA abductees as well as members of other armed groups) have by now been granted formal amnesty (OA 4).
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punishing those who have done wrong.\textsuperscript{72} Therefore, granting pardon to former LRA rebels and other perpetrators of human rights violations, resonates with fundamental cultural understandings of justice (JRP, 2011; RLP, 2005).\textsuperscript{73} On the other hand, many victims believe that the government forgot about their faith throughout the implementation of the Act, as it does not adequately address the processes of transitional justice; neither are the rights of victims addressed within the Act (JRP, 2012b; RLP, 2005).\textsuperscript{74}

As most LRA abductees are by now reinserted back into society – generally living alongside the people they have victimized – the rising of tension within communities has been unavoidable. Victim’s grievances are worsened by the government’s lack of accountability for its own wrongdoing throughout the war and its aftermath (Esuruku, 2012; RLP, 2004; JRP, 2011).\textsuperscript{75} Not only is it highly questionable whether the Museveni regime is genuinely addressing the processes of post-conflict recovery and development; it also remains silent about the atrocities committed by its soldiers throughout the war (JRP, 2012b).\textsuperscript{76} Investigations of abuse by the government’s army – the NRA, that was later renamed the UPDF – are not made public and specific accounts of historical events have been denied (Nannyonjo, 2005).\textsuperscript{77}

Nevertheless, it is clear that the government army has committed massive human rights violations against the Northerners throughout the war, as it has regularly used its violence against civilians suspected of collaborating with the LRA (Nannyonjo, 2005). The government forces are alleged to have inflicted inhumane acts of torture, rape and sexual assault, as well as killing and instant execution during detention.\textsuperscript{78} In addition, when the government instituted its policy of forced displacement, it drove hundreds of thousands of (Acholi) peasants into IDP camps, as entire villages were being bombed and burned to the ground. The UPDF’s intimidation campaign – consisting of the announcement that anyone found outside the camps would be considered a rebel and would be killed – significantly restricted the movement and the freedom of the people involved (Moy, 2006).

\textsuperscript{72} OA 2; OA 3.
\textsuperscript{73} OA 3; OA 5; OA 6.
\textsuperscript{74} NGO 1.
\textsuperscript{75} NGO 2; NGO 3; OA 2; OA 3; OA 5; OA 6.
\textsuperscript{76} NGO 1; NGO 2; NGO 3; NGO 6; OA 2; OA 5; OA 6.
\textsuperscript{77} NGO 2; NGO 3; NGO 5; NGO 6; NGO 8; Symposium on transitional justice, see supra note 63.
\textsuperscript{78} While the LRA has hardly been responsible for acts of rape outside their own rebel force (Human Rights Watch, 2005), the UPDF soldiers are said to have regularly inflicted acts of rape in IDP camps and when encountering women in rural areas. Consequently, while the national average of HIV prevalence in Uganda has decreased from 18% in 1992 to 6.4% in 2005, the prevalence rate in the war-affected areas was still 8.2% (Republic of Uganda, 2007). The conflict as well as the living conditions in the IDP camps have been identified as the most important factor of the spread of the virus.
These massive human rights violations, implemented by the government and executed by its soldiers, have by now been widely documented by various NGOs and other organisations.\textsuperscript{79}

The governments lack of accountability has resulted in an enormous resentment towards the Museveni regime amongst the majority of the Northerners.\textsuperscript{80} Consequently, they have little fate in Museveni’s announcement of moving towards a comprehensive TJ policy. They also assert that, as the government had the responsibility to protect them, but failed to do so, it should restore their lives back to normalcy. There is an urgent need for reparations and compensation, as many victims not only lost loved ones as a consequence of the war, but property, land and cattle as well (JRP, 2012a; JRP, 2012b). However, most victims, including former LRA abductees, feel powerless in demanding these types of reimbursements towards a government they largely characterize by its corrupt tendencies.\textsuperscript{81}

5.3 Evaluation and Current Reintegration Activities

Northern Uganda to date still has a large number of (inter)national NGOs and other organisations that are trying to assist those affected by the conflict (Esuruku, 2012; Annan et al., 2006). However, it has been largely impossible to monitor performance and impact of the various programmes due to a lack of coherence between the different types of organisations (Republic of Uganda, 2007).

Likewise, as Uganda lacked an official DDR operation, various NGOs and other organisations – all with their own programmes and agendas – have provided reintegration assistance to those returning from the LRA. However, there has been no systematic evaluation on the effectiveness of the programmes (Vnick & Pham, 2009).\textsuperscript{82} Little is known about whether the efforts have contributed to a positive reintegration process of former LRA child soldiers. As seen in chapter 2, even when it comes to official DDR operations, there is hardly any evidence on whether the programmes work. Yet, as many reintegration programmes have followed a top-down approach, they considered their programmes to be successful without any local input (Maina, 2009a; Akello et al., 2006).

Despite the lack of a coherent evaluation tool, numerous (inter)national NGOs and other organisations are currently still involved in the reintegration process of former LRA abductees. The practises of these organisations vary from advocacy and research activities, to more practical

\textsuperscript{80} NGO 2; NGO 3; OA 2; OA 3; OA 5; OA 6.
\textsuperscript{81} NGO 2; NGO 3; NGO 8; OA 2; OA 5; Symposium on transitional justice, see supra note 63.
\textsuperscript{82} NGO 2; NGO 4; NGO 7; NGO 6.
assistance related to reconciliation, psychosocial support and/or education. Nevertheless, the northern regions of Uganda are currently being confronted with a gradual phase out of international NGOs, as the provision of humanitarian assistance is no longer required. The diverse organisations still offering reintegration assistance, may have different viewpoints on the current needs of former abductees and their communities. Consequently, effective and coherent long-term reintegration assistance to former LRA child soldiers, is generally lacking.

Follow-up support to former LRA abductees who have been reinserted into the community has also been limited (Allen & Schomerus, 2006; CSUCS, 2008b; Vinck & Pham, 2009). Although most rehabilitation centres have made sincere efforts to monitor the well-being of former abductees after reinsertion, follow-up support have proved to be an enormous challenge. To begin with, considering the large number of returnees, it is impossible to follow all who have been reinserted. Distance of the homes from the centres and former abductees’ reluctance to be visited by counsellors, are contributing factors for the low intensity of contact (Akello et al., 2006). Moreover, as described in paragraph 5.1, about half of all former child soldiers never passed through the formal reintegration process, leaving it largely unclear who these people are, where they are located and how they should be reached. Most important, as discussed in chapter 2, is the limited funding made available for long-term reintegration assistance and follow up support. Consequently, little organisations have provided support for programmes beyond the initial reunification and reinsertion processes of former LRA abductees (CSUCS, 2008a).

5.4 Conclusion
The process of reintegration in Northern Uganda has been largely characterized by a variety of reintegration programmes. These programmes have been established by numerous NGOs and other organisations to assist the thousands of returning LRA abductees, especially children and youth. However, about half of all former LRA child soldiers never passed through the formal reintegration process, but went straight home to their families upon their return. Even those who followed a reintegration scheme have received limited assistance. The main focus of these schemes was

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83 NGO 1; NGO 2; NGO 3; NGO 4; NGO 5; NGO 6; NGO 7; NGO 8; NGO 9.
84 NGO 2; NGO 4.
85 NGO 5; NGO 9.
86 NGO 2; NGO 4; NGO 7.
87 Representatives of these centres regularly visit communities in Northern Uganda. During these field trips, they examine the level of acceptance within the community and try to determine the psychological well-being of former abductees (NGO 4; NGO 7).
88 NGO 7.
89 NGO 4; NGO 5; NGO 7.
directed towards the short-term processes of family reunification and reinsertion into the community. Limited attention has been paid towards the wider process of reintegration, consisting of all four components as mentioned in chapter 2. As a result, many former LRA child soldiers were largely unprepared to return to their community.

Once returned – regardless of passing through the formal reintegration process or not – former LRA child soldiers have been confronted with the devastating consequences of the war. Post-conflict Northern Uganda has been largely characterised by trauma, poverty and a breakdown of social and cultural norms and values amongst the war-affected communities. Instable governmental rule seems to limit opportunities for recovery and development, while at the same time, sustainable transitional justice mechanisms are lacking. While this context severely complicates reintegration of former LRA child soldiers, long-term reintegration assistance and/or follow up support have been limited. Moreover, what clearly seems to be lacking is an evaluation tool to distinguish if and how different types of reintegration assistance lead to different outcomes. Consequently, it is largely unknown to what extent the diverse programmes have contributed to a positive reintegration process of former LRA child soldiers.
CHAPTER 6
THE OUTCOME OF LONG-TERM REINTEGRATION OF FORMER LRA CHILD SOLDIERS

So far, there have been few attempts to take a closer look at long-term reintegration of former LRA child soldiers and/or how they have managed to cope with their past over the long run (CSUCS, 2008b). Consequently, little is known about how they fare in contemporary post-conflict Northern Uganda.

Conducting research on long-term reintegration of former LRA child soldiers, is not without its challenges. First, their age difference is exceptionally wide-ranging: some have currently well passed the age of thirty, while others are still in their (late) teens or early adulthood.\(^\text{90}\) Secondly, as abduction has taken place for more than a decade, some former LRA child soldiers have returned for well over 15 years at the time of writing, while others came back relatively recently (with a few individuals returning up to today). Thirdly, their various backgrounds, as well as the variety in personal experiences and personalities, all influence individual reintegration trajectories and outcomes.\(^\text{91}\) Lastly, many problems faced by returnees are similar to that of other Northerners, as the war and its aftermath have had an impact on most people’s lives. The problems faced by former child soldiers might, however, be intensified by their abduction and time spent in captivity (Annan et al., 2009; Vindevogel et al., 2013).

Taking the above into account, drawing general conclusions on the outcome of long-term reintegration of former LRA child soldiers is extremely difficult, if not completely impossible. As will be discussed more extensively below, some returnees have been able to readjust to civilian life relatively well, while others still struggle tremendously with their violent past. However, as effective long-term reintegration assistance and follow up support is generally lacking, it is unknown how many of them still face serious problems related to reintegration and how many can be considered to have ‘reintegrated successfully’.\(^\text{92}\) Yet, as the remainder of this chapter will reveal, the results of this

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\(^{90}\) As seen in figure 2, the LRA abducted extremely young children as well as those in their late teens.

\(^{91}\) As described in chapter 3, children from different backgrounds have been abducted from various regions; mostly from the Acholi districts of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader, but also from the Lango and Teso sub-regions.

\(^{92}\) NGO 2; NGO 4; NGO 6; NGO 7.
study do show certain patterns in reintegration successes as well as the most prominent issues currently faced by former LRA child soldiers in post-conflict Northern Uganda. The following paragraphs provide an overview of the main outcomes of long-term reintegration of former LRA child soldiers, based on the four components of reintegration as described in chapter 2.\footnote{When reading the remainder of this chapter, it must be kept in mind that these components are partially interrelated; instability in one or more components of reintegration, generally influences and/or complicates the realization of the other components.}

### 6.1 Physical Reintegration

Physical reintegration has been defined as ‘the process whereby former child soldiers are offered medical assistance and sometimes a stable environment in which they can recover from their health related problems’. Reliable data related to this component of reintegration is scarce, as little research has been done on the physical health status of former LRA child soldiers, especially when it concerns health problems on the long run.

A few studies provide some basic information on the initial health status of former LRA abductees upon, or shortly after, their return. The Coalition to stop the Use of Child Soldiers (2008b) estimated that around 13% of abductees in the Teso region had serious wounds upon their return, mostly related to untreated bullet wounds and injuries from beatings. In addition, a United Nations report of 1999, indicated that at least 85% of girls who arrived at a rehabilitation centre in Gulu, had contracted a sexually transmitted disease as a result from rape and sexual abuse.\footnote{Report of the Secretary General on the Abducted Children of Northern Uganda, E/CN.4/1999/69. Para. 23.} Although consistent numbers are lacking, it has also been documented that HIV/AIDS infections—amongst returning boys as well as girls—have been frequently present (CSUCS, 2008b).\footnote{NGO 5.}

As described in chapter 5, former LRA child soldiers who took part in the formal reintegration process usually received some form of medical assistance upon their return. Those who went directly home to their families without passing through a rehabilitation centre, regularly underwent a (basic) form of treatment as well.\footnote{FA 2; FA 9; FA 10.} Yet, some returnees are currently still faced with physical health problems related to their abduction, which is affecting various aspects of their lives.\footnote{FA 2; FA 6; FA 10; FA 11; FA 13; FA 14.} Chronic chest and back pain, resulting from carrying heavy loads during captivity, was the most reported problem.\footnote{FA 6; FA 10; FA 11; FA 13; FA 14.} One
respondent, who returned over 15 years ago, even stated that he is partly disabled for the rest of his life, as the upper part of his backbone is permanently damaged: 99

“After working an hour in my garden, I already need to take a rest.”

Permanent health issues related to mistreatment and beatings have also been reported: a respondent, who returned around ten years ago, described how an LRA commander once stamped on his foot as a form of punishment for standing out of line while saluting. As a result, he is still unable to walk long distances. 100 Three respondents mentioned physical problems due to (untreated) bullet wounds; two of them experienced chronic pain as a result of these injuries. 101

Another troubling issue is the lack of financial means to provide for medical treatment of those in need. The story of a 15 year old girl illustrates this quite well: she was abducted with her mother in 2005. After spending two years in captivity, they managed to escape the LRA. After their return, the mother turned out to be HIV positive as a result of systematic sexual abuse by two LRA commanders. Nowadays, over six years later, she is developing serious health issues due to the virus. The 15 year old girl is now mainly responsible for the families’ income, as many of their relatives have been killed by the LRA and they receive little support from the community. As the family is struggling to survive, anti-retroviral (ARV) medicines for her mother can only be afforded once in a while. Moreover, due to this situation, the girl had been unable to attend school for the last two years. 102

As the above-mentioned cases illustrate, former LRA child soldiers may be faced with permanent injuries or physical health problems as a result of their abduction. Yet, none of the respondents indicated that a large number of returnees are still faced with serious problems related to physical reintegration. It must also be noted that not only former child soldiers may suffer from permanent physical damage. As described in chapter 3 and 5, other members of the war-affected communities also suffered from extreme human rights abuses – committed by the LRA as well as the government army – that have resulted in permanent injuries and/or illnesses amongst the victims. 103

99 FA 11.
100 FA 2.
101 FA 2; FA 6.
102 FA 17.
103 See page 21 for the LRAs mutilation practices; see footnote 78 for the spread of the HIV virus amongst the war affected communities, partly caused by acts of rape committed by UPDF soldiers.
6.2 Psychological Reintegration

Psychological reintegration has been defined as ‘the assistance given to former child soldiers which enables them to readjust to civilian life and cope with their war-related experiences’. As seen in chapter 2, it mostly concerns the moral development and mental health status of former child soldiers, influenced by the witnessing of and/or participation in extreme violence.

6.2.1 Moral development and aggression

Some studies indicate that former LRA child soldiers regularly experienced difficulties in controlling their aggressive behaviour upon their return (CSUCS, 2008b; Maina, 2009a; Akello et al., 2006). Although these studies present little evidence to support these assumptions, a substantial proportion, particularly boys, are said to have resorted to crimes such as looting and harassing people. Other scholars have argued that aggression amongst returnees was low, as they observed little difference in aggressive behaviour in relation to their non-abducted peers (Annan et al., 2009; Blattman & Annan, 2010). For example, Annan et al. (2009) found that former abductees who experienced problems with community members, typically reacted passively instead of aggressively, by ignoring people’s comments and/or by walking away.

Nowadays, aggressive and/or violent behaviour amongst former LRA child soldiers does not seem to be widespread; the various actors in the field never indicated that abduction has had a negative impact on the moral development of a large proportion of returnees. Although aggression as well as involvement in criminal activities have been reported,104 this violent behaviour seems incidental. As explained by a woman who experienced abduction herself:105

“It depends on someone’s character how he will behave nowadays. Good people have become good people again, but people with a bad character before they joined the rebels, still show bad behaviour, making the rest of us look bad too.”

Former LRA child soldiers generally claimed to be very remorseful.106 Rather than continuing their violent ways, some returnees have difficulties in coming to terms with their past, as illustrated by the story of a 26 year old man: shortly after his abduction, he was given the choice to either kill or rape his own sister. As the rebels claimed that by raping her, he would save her life, he chose the second option. Nevertheless, after he did what he was told to do, the rebels killed his sister anyway.

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104 NGO 1; NGO 2; FA 1; OA 4.
105 FA 3.
106 FA 1; FA 2; FA 3; FA 6; FA 11; FA 12; FA 13; FA 15.
Following this event, he was forced to commit many human rights abuses and after a while, he stopped feeling remorseful. As LRA commanders noticed his growing loyalty towards the rebel force, he was given the responsibility to train newly arrived abductees. He forced these ‘recruits’ to carry out the same violent acts as he was obliged to do some two years prior. Although he felt at peace with his actions at the time, he now struggles tremendously with feelings of guilt. He considered himself “possessed by the devil” while he is unable to “get rid of the evil spirits”. 107

Although the moral development of former LRA child soldiers seems minimally affected by their abduction, their behaviour in daily life is regularly perceived as deviant by their environment. On the one hand, respondents commonly claimed to react passively while having an argument or being in a conflict. 108 On the other hand, some reported that, during conflicts, community and even family members still refer to their behaviour as “rebel behaviour”. 109 For example, a respondent indicated that when a husband and wife are having marital problems, people automatically are of the impression that the returnee is causing the problems. 110

Former LRA child soldiers typically experienced these situations as a form of stigmatization. However, it has been stated by various actors in the field that some returnees actually show deviant behaviour. 111 For example, a schoolteacher mentioned that children and youth who returned from the LRA, have the tendency to hold back their thoughts, feelings and emotions. At some point, particularly when provoked by others, they might have (extreme) anger bursts, which makes their peers feel uncomfortable. 112 Other professionals claimed that, due to certain socialisation processes within the LRA as well as exposure to highly traumatic events, some returnees seem unable to re-adjust to generally accepted norms and values within society. 113 Abduction thus might have fundamentally changed the way in which former LRA child soldiers function as members in their community. Yet, as illustrated by the comments of a 15 year old girl, in time, behaviour might also ‘return to normal’. 114

107 FA 15.
108 FA 1; FA 2; FA 3; FA 6; FA 9; FA 14; FA 16.
109 FA 1; FA 3; FA 5; FA 9; FA 11; FA 12.
110 FA 5.
111 NGO 1; NGO 7; NGO 9; OA 5; OA 6; OA 8.
112 OA 8.
113 NGO 1; NGO 9; OA 5; OA 6.
114 FA 17.
“I was always angry when people gave me advice. I didn’t listen and sometimes I started fighting. Yes also physical fights. But now I listen again, especially to my mama and since I have started dancing (referring to a community program that uses music and dancing as a means of counselling war-affected children and youth)”.

6.2.2 Trauma and mental health

Most studies indicate that former LRA child soldiers generally experienced some form of distress upon their return, ranging from (extreme) anxiety to depression, psychological trauma and high rates of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Recurrent nightmares, flashbacks and even suicidal thinking were common amongst those who had recently returned (CSUCS, 2008b). Pfeiffer & Elbert (2011) concluded that former abductees suffered from severe mental ill-health as almost half of the respondents (49%) were diagnosed with PTSD, 70% expressed symptoms of depression and 59% suffered from (extreme) anxiety. In a similar vein, Okello et al. (2007) and Pham et al. (2009) argued that abducted children were significantly more affected psychologically than other war-affected children. Yet, Okello et al. (2007) also concluded that former abductees have good psychosocial adjustment, even in the presence of psychopathology.

Other studies have indicated that mental health issues amongst former LRA child soldiers are not as widespread as often mentioned in the literature. Blattman & Annan (2008 & 2010) argued that returnees appeared similar in their mental health to non-abducted youth who have also regularly been exposed to (multiple) acts of violence. Moreover, Annan et al. (2006 & 2009) concluded that most former abductees had low levels of psychological distress symptoms and that the highest symptoms of distress were disproportionately concentrated in a minority of returnees.

Taking the above into account, characterizing the mental health status of former LRA child soldiers is highly complicated: “it is an oversimplification to regard formerly abducted children as either traumatized or resilient. Their emotional outcome is more complex than that” (CSUCS, 2008b: 2). Yet, it is clear that most former LRA child soldiers still suffer from mental health issues related to their abduction.115 Some respondents claimed to feel sad on a regular basis,116 while the majority faced more serious challenges such as anxiety, sleeplessness and/or recurrent nightmares.117 One respondent described that, even after eight years, he still suffers from sleeplessness due to nightmares and flashbacks that appear on a regular basis. To make the images in his mind go away,

115 FA 2; FA 3; FA 4; FA 9; FA 10; FA 11; FA 12; FA 13; FA 14; FA 15; FA 16.
116 FA 9; FA 10.
117 FA 2; FA 3; FA 4; FA 11; FA 12; FA 13; FA 14; FA 15; FA 16.
he regularly plays loud music at night, resulting in conflicts with his neighbours who do not understand this behaviour.\textsuperscript{118} Another respondent – who returned five years ago – suffered from extreme anxiety, as he is constantly afraid of reprisals by his community members. Although concrete evidence for possible reprisals is lacking, he claimed to never leave his house after dark, as he considered it too dangerous to be on the streets at night: \textsuperscript{119}

“I know, one day they will come after me. I can’t take the risk.”

Some respondents indicated that over the years, they had been able to let go of their past.\textsuperscript{120} A young man stated that his nightmares had gradually disappeared over time,\textsuperscript{121} while another claimed that “his mind had returned to normal” and that “is enjoying life again”.\textsuperscript{122} Moreover, many respondents seem to have developed certain coping strategies, which makes it easier to deal with their psychological struggles.\textsuperscript{123} Some seemed to find relief in prayers, while others focussed on farming. Amongst the younger respondents, playing with friends as well as dancing were the most frequently mentioned strategies.\textsuperscript{124}

6.2.3 Collective trauma

Several studies indicate that the advice and guidance given to returnees – by friends, family and counsellors in rehabilitation centres – was commonly related to ‘forgetting the past’ (Annan et al., 2009; Akello et al., 2006; Corbin, 2008). Returnees were told to leave the past behind, to focus on the future and to forgive those who had harmed them. According to Annan et al. (2009), former abductees generally followed this advice by keeping silent about their experiences. Corbin described this avoidance of talking about traumatic events as “a key contributor to psychological healing” (Corbin, 2008: 328).

Nowadays, it becomes more and more clear that the discourse on ‘forgetting’ has had limited success. As described in chapter 5, not only former abductees, but entire northern communities have been confronted with (multiple) traumatic events. Various actors in the field now realize that, for many victims, it is impossible to ‘forget’ what happened to them.\textsuperscript{125} People have tried to move on

\textsuperscript{118} FA 2.
\textsuperscript{119} FA 11.
\textsuperscript{120} FA 1; FA 17; FA 18.
\textsuperscript{121} FA 1.
\textsuperscript{122} FA 18.
\textsuperscript{123} FA 1; FA 4; FA 5; FA 9; FA 10; FA 12; FA 14; FA 17.
\textsuperscript{124} FA 1; FA 12; FA 14; FA 17.
\textsuperscript{125} NGO 2; NGO 3; NGO 4; NGO 5; NGO 8; NGO 9; OA 1; OA 5; OA 6. See also JRP, 2012 & 2013.
without properly reflecting on their traumatic experiences, however, the images and memories in their minds have not disappeared. They are now slowly beginning to open up, as they are no longer able to avoid the disturbing memories of the past. Consequently, symptoms of anxiety as well as other forms of distress are coming more and more out in the open.\textsuperscript{126}

Most respondents expressed the urgent need for counselling,\textsuperscript{127} however, psychosocial services are extremely scarce.\textsuperscript{128} Attempts to counselling by the (former) rehabilitation centres have been limited, as returnees generally could only be accommodated in these centres for a short period of time.\textsuperscript{129} Other victims of the war, as well as former abductees who returned without passing through the formal reintegration process, generally received even less counselling, or no assistance whatsoever.\textsuperscript{130}

At the meantime, the war-affected communities are faced with serious issues which, according to various actors in the field, can be related to (collective) trauma. Various organisations have documented increased suicide rates within the northern regions over the last couple of years.\textsuperscript{131} High rates of alcohol consumption and addiction amongst the war-affected communities have also been reported on a regular basis.\textsuperscript{132} Moreover, trauma amongst the Northerners is thought to exacerbate the already weakened work ethics within the communities,\textsuperscript{133} which have resulted from a dependence on relief aid for a long period of time.\textsuperscript{134} As former LRA child soldiers are regularly faced with ‘double trauma’ (they not only have to deal with traumatic experiences related to their abduction, but equally face the consequences of the war), they seem particularly vulnerable to be absorbed in these destructive events.\textsuperscript{135} Yet, as their family and/or community members might be caught up in their own feelings of distress, they are not always willing or able to advise, guide or otherwise support these former abductees.\textsuperscript{136} With this context in mind, it has regularly been stated that the actual processes of healing and recovery have yet to get started.\textsuperscript{137} As stated by an NGO worker: \textsuperscript{138}

\textsuperscript{126} NGO 2; NGO 4; NGO 5.
\textsuperscript{127} FA 2; FA 6; FA 9; FA 10; FA 12; FA 14; FA 15; FA 16; NGO 2; NGO 4; NGO 5; NGO 8; NGO 9; OA 5; OA 6.
\textsuperscript{128} NGO 2; NGO 4; NGO 5; NGO 7; NGO 8; NGO 9.
\textsuperscript{129} See chapter 5 for more information. See also Akello et al. (2006).
\textsuperscript{130} FA 1; FA 2; FA 9; FA 12; FA 14; OA 5; OA 6.
\textsuperscript{131} NGO 2; NGO 5.
\textsuperscript{132} NGO 1; NGO 2; NGO 5.
\textsuperscript{133} NGO 1; NGO 4; NGO 5.
\textsuperscript{134} See chapter 5 for more information.
\textsuperscript{135} NGO 1; NGO 2; NGO 4; NGO 5; OA 1; OA 5.
\textsuperscript{136} NGO 6; OA 5; OA 6.
\textsuperscript{137} NGO 2; NGO 4; NGO 5.
\textsuperscript{138} NGO 5.
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“The rehabilitation process has actually just begun”

6.3 Social Reintegration

Social reintegration, ‘the creation of an environment in which former child soldiers are accepted back into their families and communities’ has been the focus of many scholars. Some studies indicate that this component of reintegration has been reasonably successful, as popular discourse in Uganda holds that former abductees should not be held accountable for their actions (Blattman and Annan, 2008; Annan et al., 2009).139 As almost the entire Northern population have been confronted with abductions of friends and/or relatives, there has generally been an awareness that abduction could happen to anyone (Veale & Stavrou, 2011; Vinck & Pham, 2009). The widely accepted discourse on tolerance and compassion may further be rooted in the ‘culture of forgiveness’ that prevails amongst the Northern communities (Vinck & Pham, 2009).140 On top, community sentisation campaigns have been carried out on a large scale, which reminded community members that abductees did not chose to commit violent acts, but instead were forced to do so (Corbin, 2008; Akello et al., 2006). Yet, as the following paragraphs will reveal, despite the popular discourse on forgiveness, issues related to the social component of reintegration have been present and are still present up to today.

6.3.1 Family acceptance and marriage

Former abductees – whether or not they passed through a rehabilitation centre – have generally been warmly welcomed by their family members upon their return (Corbin, 2008; CSUCS, 2008b). Blattman & Annan (2008) found that the majority of returnees (over 90%) were accepted back into their families without insult, blame or physical harm.

In the long run, former LRA child soldiers have generally been able to reconnect with their family members.141 Most respondents had good family relationships and conflicts have rarely been mentioned. However, as illustrated by the stories of two respondents, family relations may be severely distorted in cases where a close relative had been a UPDF soldier and fought against the LRA throughout the war. The first respondent, whose father had been a UPDF soldier, was well received by his family members upon his initial return. As time passed by, his father started to express more and more anger towards him, as he was unable to properly deal with the fact that his son had been

139 NGO 3; NGO 6; OA 2; OA 4; OA 6.
140 See also chapter 5.
141 FA 1; FA 4; FA 5; FA 6; FA 7; FA 9; FA 10; FA 14; FA 18.
part of the rebel force he hated so deeply. Eventually, things got out of hand; at the time the interview was conducted, his father had been arrested for physically abusing his son: 142

“He was always angry no matter what I did. He has forgotten I am his son. I am just the enemy”.

The second respondent told a similar story: his father had also been a UPDF soldier and either ignored him completely or mentally abused him, for example by calling him “the lost one”. As this respondent was the only one in his immediate family who had experienced abduction, other family members also struggled with his return. Partly due to the continuous conflicts within his family, he recently migrated from Northern Uganda to the capital city of Kampala. 143

Marital problems have also been reported. 144 Although most (adult) respondents were married at the time the interviews were conducted, it was mentioned by a professional that a considerable amount of former LRA child soldiers is supposedly unmarried. 145 According to this expert, these returnees are unable to find a suitable partner, typically due to unstable mental health. As illustrated by the comments of a 26 year old male, former child soldiers themselves might feel they have nothing to offer to a potential partner: 146

“Who would want to marry me? I own nothing, except my disturbing memories of the past.”

Problems between spouses were also reported. 147 These problems generally involved women who returned pregnant or with children as a result from sexual abuse within the LRA. Some of these women returned with the father of these children and saw no other option than to marry this man. Abuse within these marriages – generally a continuance of the practices these women experienced during captivity – seem regularly present. 148 Other women, who wedded someone unrelated to their abduction, face different problems that are mainly related to rejection of the children they brought home from the LRA by their spouse. 149
6.3.2 Stigmatisation within the wider population

As has been widely documented, reintegration into the community has been a slow and complicated process. Upon their return, former abductees were regularly faced with hostility from community members; stigmatization, isolation and the use of abusive language have been experienced by many. Moreover, despite the efforts to sensitize communities, some members feared returnees’ behaviours, whether or not they had a legitimate reason to do so (Corbin, 2008; Annan et al., 2009; CSUCS, 2008b).

The majority of the problems between former abductees and their communities diminished over time (Annan et al., 2009). They reconnected with community members by doing valued work such as farming or going to school (Corbin, 2008). Moreover, traditional ceremonies – encouraging reconciliation and truth telling between returnees and their victims – have been performed on a large scale (Akello et al., 2006; Veale & Stavrou, 2011). Respondents who participated in these ceremonies, generally stated that it has helped them to reconnect with their communities. However, as most of these rituals are based on a gathering between those who have been victimized and those who have caused harm, they can only take place when victims know their perpetrators’ identity or vice versa. In the aftermath of two decades of warfare, it might be unclear who has to be reconciled with whom: former LRA child soldiers might have caused harm to a large number of people while war-affected people might have been victimized by multiple actors. As a result, these ceremonies could only contribute to reconciliation between former LRA child soldiers and their communities up to a certain extent.

Although stigmatization of former LRA child soldiers has diminished over time, it has not yet fully subsided. While some respondents stated they no longer experience difficulties within their communities, others claimed that they are still being stigmatized, or in some instances, harassed.

“Sometimes when I have arguments here, they say they wish I had died in the bush” (referring to her time spend in captivity).

150 FA 1; FA 2; FA 14.
151 OA 2; OA 3; NGO 1; NGO 2.
152 FA 3; FA 4; FA 6; FA 9; FA 10.
153 OA 3; NGO 2.
154 FA 1; FA 4; FA 6; FA 10; FA 13; FA 18.
155 FA 2; FA 3; FA 5; FA 9; FA 11; FA 12; FA 14; FA 15; FA 16; FA 17.
156 FA3.
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Respondents specifically mentioned to regularly be the target of gossiping. For example, a male respondent stated: 157

“They say the reason my brother is rich is because I steel.”

Two specific groups of former LRA child soldiers – youth and women who returned with children – are particularly confronted with stigmatization.158 Youth predominantly seemed to experience bullying at school, where they are regularly called “the children of Kony”.159 The majority also reported isolation and separation between themselves and their peers.160 Consequently, they preferred to interact with other former child soldiers, amongst whom they felt accepted and understood.

The second group – women who returned with children – are said to be prone to stigmatization for two main reasons: first, community members may not understand why some of these women have married their abuser. Second, people regularly try to avoid and/or harass their children, whose father has generally been an (unknown) LRA commander. When these women stand up for their children, conflicts with community members may arise.161

The children who have been conceived and/or born in captivity, are extremely vulnerable to rejection, stigmatization and/or harassment.162 One respondent even claimed that her son who is born in captivity, is beaten by community members on a regular basis.163 These children – sometimes already in their teens by now – are generally considered a special group with problems of their own.164 It is believed that many have no sense of belonging and are struggling with forming their identities. In many instances, their father is no longer in the picture and they might not even know who their father is. Moreover, they might be unable to adjust to a civilian lifestyle: as most have been born in captivity, all they knew is life within the LRA rebel force. The story of one of these children (13 years of age) illustrates this quite well: the boy was taken out of LRA captivity at the age of 6. He spends most of his time by himself in the bush. Nobody knows where exactly he goes to, not

157 FA 9.
158 Youth and women who returned with children have also been mentioned as vulnerable groups in several studies conducted in the early stages of the reintegration process. For example, see CSUCS (2008b) on the position of youth and CSUCS (2008b); Akello et al. (2006) on the vulnerability of women.
159 FA 13; FA 16; FA 17.
160 FA 13; FA 14; FA 15; FA 16; FA 17.
161 FA 3; OA 6; NGO 4; NGO 5.
162 FA 5; NGO 5; NGO 6; NGO 7; OA 7.
163 FA 5.
164 NGO 4; NGO 5; NGO 7; NGO 9; OA 1; OA 8.
even his family members. He generally only comes home for dinner and even spends most of the nights outdoors, as he prefers to sleep in the open air.\textsuperscript{165}

### 6.3.3 Land conflicts

As already pointed out by Quinn (2009), land conflicts have been a huge matter of concern in post-conflict Northern Uganda.\textsuperscript{166} The conflicts over land “whose boundaries have been blurred by long displacement, disfigured by war, and rendered uncertain by ambiguous laws” (Quinn, 2009: 57), begun to erupt from the time people started to return from the IDP camps. As described in chapter 5, some people returned to their original homes, while others settled elsewhere. As a result, conflicts have arisen over who exactly owns which plots of land. People regularly returned home to find that their property had been taken over by others, who refused to settle elsewhere. On other occasions, people were presumed to have died during the war, but eventually returned home anyway.

The conflicts over landownership have persisted over the years as they proved extremely hard to solve.\textsuperscript{167} Although these conflicts affect the northern communities in general, former LRA child soldiers have been particularly prone to loss of land.\textsuperscript{168} Returnees whose parents have passed away, have regularly been chased away from their ancestral land. Especially those who had been forced to commit violent acts against their community members, were, in some instances, no longer welcome in their village. Problems may also arise when the man, as head of the family, is missing or has died, as land ownership in Northern Uganda is based on patrilineal arrangements. As a result, some unmarried females – especially those who returned with children – found themselves nowhere to go. Without a possibility to settle on a husband’s property, their opportunities to claim (a plot of) land, or even a place to stay within their community have been very limited.\textsuperscript{169} Those who have been unable to return to their communities, generally ended up in temporarily shelters or migrated to town.\textsuperscript{170} The consequences have been enormous: without support from their communities and the possibility to conduct themselves in farming, these returnees struggled heavily to rebuild their lives in the civilian world.

\textsuperscript{165} OA 7.
\textsuperscript{166} NGO 1; NGO 2; NGO 3; NGO 4; NGO 5; NGO 6; NGO 7; NGO 8; OA 1; OA 2; OA 4.
\textsuperscript{167} NGO 1; NGO 2; NGO 3; NGO 5; NGO 6; OA 1.
\textsuperscript{168} NGO 2; NGO 4; NGO 5, NGO 6; OA 1.
\textsuperscript{169} NGO 1; NGO 2; NGO 3; NGO 4; NGO 5; NGO 6; NGO 8; OA 1; OA 2.
\textsuperscript{170} NGO 2; NGO 8; OA 1; FA 3; FA 4.
6.4 Economic Reintegration

Economic reintegration concerns ‘assisting former child soldiers to (re)gain access to means of production and employment’. This component of reintegration has generally been a huge challenge for former LRA child soldiers. Yet, as seen in chapter 5, poverty is a daily reality for most people in Northern Uganda. As a result, the economic challenges faced by returnees are a general source of concern.\textsuperscript{171} Livelihood opportunities in the war-affected regions are scarce and the poverty headcount is higher than the national average. Moreover, with no comprehensive reparation or compensation scheme, the loss of property, land and cattle as a result of the war, has severely affected the inhabitants of the North.\textsuperscript{172} Consequently, economic hardship is amongst the highest communally reported challenges in the aftermath of the war (Vindevogel et al., 2013).

Although economic hardship affects most Northerners, abduction has had a negative influence on both education and earnings. Blattman & Annan (2010) found that (long) abductions were strongly correlated with losses in education and literacy. On average, former abductees had over half a year less education than non-abducted youth and were nearly twice as likely to be illiterate. The Coalition to stop the Use of Child Soldiers (2008b) concluded that, although 79 per cent of returnees had achieved to go back to school, prior to their abduction, 97 per cent of them had been enrolled. Moreover, Blattman & Annan (2010) found that abducted youth were half as likely to be engaged in skilled or capital-intensive labour and had a third lower earnings then their non-abducted peers. Although there was some catch-up over time, abduction led to a persistent gap between formerly abducted and non-abducted people.

While educational losses have been mentioned by several respondents,\textsuperscript{173} former LRA child soldiers have also benefitted from their status as a former abductee in various ways. Several respondents have had the opportunity to participate in a vocational training provided by the rehabilitation centres or other organisations engaged in the reintegration process of former abductees.\textsuperscript{174} Training like tailoring, motorcycle repair and (basic) entrepreneurship have given these returnees the opportunity to eventually start their own small business. In addition, former LRA child soldiers have regularly been encouraged to engage themselves into farmers’ groups, which were trained in modern agricultural practices and animal traction.\textsuperscript{175} Some have also used their amnesty certificates to obtain

\textsuperscript{171} NGO 1; NGO 2; NGO 3; NGO 5; NGO 8; OA 4; OA 5; OA 6.
\textsuperscript{172} See chapter 5 for more information.
\textsuperscript{173} FA 2; FA 3; FA 4; FA 6; FA 9; FA 10; FA 12.
\textsuperscript{174} FA 3; FA 4; FA 10; FA 13.
\textsuperscript{175} NGO 7; FA 6; FA 7.
scholarships or other grants for business, while non-abducted peers had little opportunity to benefit from these services (Maina, 2009a).\textsuperscript{176}

Those who had not achieved to go back to school, had mostly lacked the financial means to do so.\textsuperscript{177} Other respondents, especially returnees who had been away from home for several years, mentioned they considered themselves too old to go back.\textsuperscript{178}

“I was like 25 or older when I came home. How could I go back to school?”

Respondents who did not go back to school and have not participated in a vocational training, generally engaged themselves in farming.\textsuperscript{179} Moreover, a large proportion of the ‘boba boda drivers’, who transport people on the back of their motorcycles, are said to be former abductees.\textsuperscript{180} Former child soldiers who migrated to the capital city of Kampala, are supposedly hired as guards at shops, banks or other offices at a regular basis, as they “know how to handle a gun”.\textsuperscript{181}

\textbf{6.5 Conclusion}

The outcome of long-term reintegration of former LRA child soldiers shows a complex picture. While some components have been passed through relatively successful, the problems related to other components are still many.

Former child soldiers may suffer from permanent health issues such as (untreated) injuries, chronic back pain due to carrying heavy loads and/or HIV/AIDS infection as a result of sexual abuse. However, large-scale issues related to the physical component of reintegration do not seem present. The outcome on psychological reintegration shows a more complicated picture: although the moral development of former LRA child soldiers seems minimally affected by abduction, their behaviour in daily life is regularly perceived as deviant by the environment. Moreover, returnees generally still suffer from mental health problems related to the witnessing of and/or participation in extreme violence. Although some respondents have been able to let go of their past, most of them were confronted with anxiety, sleeplessness, flashbacks and/or recurrent nightmares on a regular basis. However, they generally receive little counselling and/or mental support from their community.

\textsuperscript{176} FA 5.
\textsuperscript{177} FA 2; FA 3; FA 4; FA 6; FA 12.
\textsuperscript{178} FA 10.
\textsuperscript{179} FA 6; FA 9; FA 10; NGO 1; NGO 2.
\textsuperscript{180} FA 11; OA 1; NGO 6.
\textsuperscript{181} FA 1; OA 1.
The findings on social reintegration are, to some extent, contradictory: on the one hand, popular discourse clearly holds that former abductees should not be held accountable for their actions. On the other hand, former LRA child soldiers are still regularly faced with stigmatization and/or exclusion. They also seem particularly prone to be caught up in the large-scale conflicts over landownership, which currently haunt the war affected regions. Amongst the returnees, youth and women who returned with children are predominantly confronted with hostility of community members. Bullying of youth and rejection of the children who have been conceived and/or born in captivity, were reported on a regular basis.

Economic reintegration of former LRA child soldiers remains a matter of concern, although (severe) poverty and economic hardship are a reality for most inhabitants of the North. One the one hand, – due to time away from schooling and work experience – returnees may suffer from educational losses and limited economic opportunities. On the other hand, some have clearly benefitted from vocational training, scholarships and/or other grants offered by reintegration centres or other organisations, while these services were less available for non-abducted people.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to gain a better understanding of long-term reintegration of former child soldiers within a post-conflict society. Based on a case study on former LRA abductees in Northern Uganda, it addressed the various aspects of long-term reintegration, as well as post-conflict stressors influencing this phenomenon. The research question had been formulated as follows:

‘To what extent have former LRA child soldiers successfully reintegrated in post-conflict Northern Uganda?’

The findings of this study – based on an evaluation of available literature and two months of qualitative research in various regions of Northern Uganda – indicate that reintegration of former child soldiers is a highly complex process. Reintegration includes aspects on micro-, meso- and macro levels and it consists of at least four components: a physical, psychological, social and economic component. Physical reintegration aims to provide for medical care to former child soldiers returning with injuries and/or illnesses while the psychological component enables them to readjust to civilian life and cope with their war-related experiences. Social reintegration aims to assist former child soldiers to resettle in communities. Lastly, economic reintegration concerns assisting returnees to (re)gain access to means of production and employment. Despite the various aspects of reintegration, programmes on the ground predominantly focus on the short-term processes of family reuniﬁcation and reinsertion into the community. Long-term reintegration assistance and follow up support – related to all four components of reintegration – is generally limited.

However, reintegration does not end after the processes of reunification and reinsertion. To the contrary: reintegration generally takes place in a post-conflict society, where communities are affected by collective trauma and where most of the societal, economic and political structures are destroyed by warfare. Consequently, once reinserted into the community, former child soldiers not only have to deal with their individual reintegration process, but they equally face the challenges related to the aftermath of the war. The case of Northern Uganda illustrates this quite well.
Throughout the civil war (1986-2006), Joseph Kony’s Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) abducted between 25,000 to 80,000 youth as a method of forced conscription. Although it is unclear how many abductees can be classified as (former) child soldiers, the LRA predominantly targeted under-18s, with the aim of either using them in its armed forces or for combat support roles. These children, while being systematically abused themselves, have generally been forced to commit severe atrocities, predominantly against members of their own communities in the North.

The process of reintegration in Northern Uganda has been largely characterized by a variety of reintegration programmes, established to assist the thousands of returning LRA abductees, especially children and youth. However, about half of all former child soldiers never passed through the formal reintegration process but went straight home to their families upon their return. These returnees hardly received any form of reintegration assistance, while those who followed a reintegration scheme received limited assistance; the length of stay in the rehabilitation centres has been largely dependent on the time it took to trace one’s family and less on the actual needs of individual returnees. As a result, most former LRA child soldiers were largely unprepared to return to their community, while long-term reintegration assistance was generally lacking.

Once returned – regardless of passing through the formal reintegration process or not – former abductees have been confronted with the devastating consequences of the war. Many former child soldiers, especially those who returned before the end of the conflict, ended up in one of the many IDP camps before they were able to return to their original home. Long-term displacement and the massive human rights violations – committed by the LRA rebel force but by the UPDF soldiers as well – resulted in collective trauma and changes in social and cultural norms and values amongst the war-affected communities. Moreover, (severe) poverty and instable governmental rule limit opportunities for post-conflict recovery and development, while at the same time, comprehensive transitional justice mechanisms are lacking.

With this context in mind, long-term reintegration of former LRA child soldiers has been a slow and difficult process. On the one hand, the outcome of reintegration can be considered relatively successful: instead of continuing their violent ways, former LRA child soldiers have generally picked up their lives in the civilian world. As popular discourse in Northern Uganda holds that former abductees should not be held accountable for their actions, most of them have been able to return to their communities and/or are (happily) married. Moreover, most returnees have found (or are in the process of finding) ways to making a living, mostly through completion of their education, participation in vocational training, farming, and/or by starting their own small business. Overall,
these positive outcomes are in consistence with the results of the few studies that have currently been conducted on long-term reintegration of former child soldiers.

On the other hand, the findings of this study clearly indicate that the problems faced by former LRA child soldiers, are still many. Although some abductees have returned for well over 15 years at the time of writing, problems related to all four components of reintegration, are still present. First, the findings on physical reintegration suggest that – although there are no indications for large-scale problems related to this component of reintegration – former LRA child soldiers may suffer from permanent health issues related to their abduction. (Untreated) injuries, chronic back pain due to carrying heavy loads and/or HIV/AIDS infection as a result of sexual abuse are the most frequently mentioned problems. Second, the outcome on psychological reintegration indicates that abduction has had a long-term effect on the mental health status of former LRA child soldiers. Although their moral development seems minimally affected by abduction, their behaviour in daily life is regularly perceived as deviant by the environment. Whether returnees actually do show deviant behaviour or whether this assumption is predominantly a result of stigmatization, is a question that remains. What is clear, is that former LRA child soldiers still suffer from mental health problems related to the witnessing of and/or participation in extreme violence. Although some returnees have been able to let go of their past, issues like anxiety, sleeplessness, flashbacks and/or recurrent nightmares are still largely present.

Social reintegration also remains a matter of concern: despite the popular discourse on forgiveness, former LRA child soldiers still mention stigmatization, harassment and/or exclusion by community members on a regular basis. Moreover, they seem particularly prone to be caught up in the large-scale conflicts over landownership, which currently haunt the war affected regions. Although problems within the family seem scarce, family bonds may be severely disrupted when a close family member has been a UPDF soldier throughout the war and has difficulties with accepting the fact that the returnee has been part of their enemy; the LRA rebel force. Amongst the returnees, youth and women who returned with children are predominantly confronted with hostility of community members. Bullying of youth and rejection of the children who have been conceived and/or born in captivity, were reported on a regular basis.

Lastly, problems related to economic reintegration have also been reported. These problems are largely related to time away from schooling and work experience due to abduction. Returnees may be faced with educational losses and as a consequence, have limited economic opportunities within an already impoverished society.
Chapter 7: Conclusion and Discussion

The results of this study – indicating that former LRA child soldiers are still faced with several problems related to their abduction – highlight the need for long-term reintegration assistance and extensive follow-up support. On the one hand, former child soldiers are generally faced with an environment that has changed fundamentally during their absence as a result of the war. On the other hand, they themselves have also changed profoundly due to their experiences within the armed group. The complexity of restoring the lives of returning child soldiers within a war-torn society, points out that reintegration does not lend itself to short-term, ad-hoc assistance. Although short-term programmes may provide for the most urgent, basic needs of returnees, they largely fail to take into consideration what comes after the process of reinsertion. Yet, it is extremely important that organisations implement plans to ensure that former child soldiers have opportunities within the society they return to.

How should long-term reintegration assistance be implemented in practice? The findings of this study strongly indicate that many problems faced by former child soldiers are similar to that of other war-affected people. When looking at the case of Northern Uganda, the war and its aftermath have had a severe impact on almost the entire population of the North: non-abducted people may also suffer from permanent physical health problems or injuries related to war violence. Moreover, the alarming sounds on collective trauma that prevails amongst the war-affected communities, indicate that a large proportion of the Northerners struggle with their mental health as a result from exposure to traumatic events. Large-scale alcohol abuse (not only amongst former LRA child soldiers but within the northern communities in general) is another disturbing consequence of the war. Furthermore, the current land conflicts which resulted out of the large-scale displacement of almost the entire population of the Northern provinces, severely affect the Northern communities; people are supposedly being killed over these conflicts on a regular basis.182 Lastly, poverty, economic hardship and/or loss of property and cattle as a result of the war, are a reality for most inhabitants of the North.

The similarity of the problems faced by former child soldiers and war-affected communities in general, indicates that long-term reintegration assistance may best be merged into broad-based interventions aimed at development and post-conflict recovery. As already mentioned by Derluyn et al.: “there is a need to acknowledge that reintegration processes of children affected by armed conflict touch on fundamental questions of development and poverty” (Derluyn et al., 2013: 879). Reintegration programmes usually give little consideration to the war-affected communities in

182 NGO 3; OA 2.
general. The fact that former LRA abductees have been able to benefit from vocational training and/or scholarships offered by various organisations, is a perfect example of the singling out of former child soldiers over other groups of people. After all, these services have been less available for non-abducted people. The creation of broad-based, community focussed programmes would not only acknowledge that armed conflict affects most people living in war-torn societies, but also prevents inclusion and exclusion of particular groups of people.

Studying long-term reintegration touches upon another important question: when can somebody be considered to have reintegrated successfully? Reintegration assistance in practice often ends after reinsertion. However, reintegration continues far beyond this process. But when exactly does it stop? The main objective of reintegration is to restore the lives of former child soldiers to those they had before they joined the armed forces. However, as the findings of this study indicate, it might be impossible to completely restore their lives back to normalcy. As mentioned by Maina: “There is a lack of clear parameters to define the formal completion of the reintegration of ex-combatants” (Maina, 2009b: 53). Likewise, an evaluation tool to distinguish if and how different types of reintegration assistance lead to different outcomes, is also non-existent. Up to today, it is largely unclear to what extent the various programmes have contributed to a positive reintegration of former child soldiers. Although defining and measuring successful reintegration has proved extremely difficult in the past, this should not withhold IGOs and NGOs from making sincere efforts to develop a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation tool. Most certainly, there are opportunities for developing these kind of measures. As in most war zones, a large number of child soldiers return home without passing through a formal reintegration process, a good starting point would be to compare the reintegration outcomes of former child soldiers who followed a reintegration scheme with those who did not.

The findings of this study also have implications for the prevailing theories on reintegration of child soldiers. Many of the existing literature focusses on aspects on the micro and/or meso level of reintegration. For example, Annan et al. argued that reintegration must be viewed as “a dynamic process occurring between the individual, family and the community” (Annan et al., 2009: 663). Yet, as the case of Northern Uganda has shown, it is an error to ignore or minimize aspects on the macro level of reintegration. In Northern Uganda, this level is largely dominated by instable governmental rule. The issue of corruption and the (assumed) lack of genuine investment in development and post-conflict recovery by the Museveni regime, is a painful subject to many inhabitants of the North. Victim’s grievances are worsened by the government’s lack of accountability for its own wrongdoing throughout the war and its aftermath. At the same time, comprehensive transitional justice
mechanisms are lacking. While the Northern communities—sometimes with the help of NGOs—have made sincere efforts towards reconciliation of former LRA child soldiers and their victims, the need for additional measures such as reparation and compensation, are enormous. The voices of the people in this study strongly suggest that, while the LRA rebels have generally been forgiven for their actions, they feel extremely abandoned by the Museveni regime: “Museveni has put us in a bottle, like grasshoppers.” 183 “While we have lost our families and children, the government points its finger towards us and laughs.” 184 On the one hand, these feelings of ‘us against the government’ might have stimulated the present day discourse on forgiveness of former LRA abductees. On the other hand, the lack of investment in the war-affected communities, has clearly influenced the process of reintegration within post-conflict Northern Uganda, as well as post-conflict recovery as a whole.

One group of people have hardly been addressed in this study but deserve some attention in light of future research. As many former LRA child soldiers have by now grown into adulthood, it is time to take a closer look at the impact of abduction on the next generation. The results of this study point towards various “secondary generation problems”: an example is the story of the girl who is struggling to take care of her HIV positive mother, who became infected as a result of systematic rape within the LRA rebel force. Furthermore, as many returnees are still faced with various mental health issues, it is to be expected that their psychological struggles will somehow affect their offspring. Moreover, the children who have been conceived and/or born within the LRA rebel force, constitute a special group with problems of their own. They face (severe) stigmatization and rejection on a regular basis and they seem to struggle with their identity and sense of belonging. Moreover, as many don’t have a father to take care of them, they regularly don’t own or inherit any land or property, as landownership in Northern Uganda is based on patrilineal arrangements. As a consequence, their economic opportunities within post-conflict Northern Uganda, might be limited. As this next generation is now growing up, a closer look on how best to support this group of youngsters deserves some attention in future research.

183 OA 2.
184 OA 6.
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This study focusses on the long-term reintegration process and outcome of former LRA child soldiers within post-conflict Northern Uganda. During its two-decade long battle against the Ugandan government, the Lord’s Resistance Army (the LRA), abducted at least 25,000 children from the northern provinces, who were turned into soldiers or were used for ‘combat support roles’. Most of the abductees who survived the war, have by now been resettled into society for a number of years, as most returned home before the LRA’s retreat in 2007. However, it is largely unknown how they have managed to cope with their past over the long run or how they fare in post-conflict Northern Uganda. This explorative study – based on qualitative research and a two-month period of fieldwork in the Northern Provinces of Gulu, Pader and Lira – aims to fill this lack of knowledge. It argues that, although the outcome of reintegration can be considered relatively successful, the problems faced by former LRA child soldiers, are still many. They are generally faced with an environment that has changed fundamentally during their absence as a result of the war, while at the same time, they themselves have also changed profoundly due to their experiences within the LRA. Consequently, former LRA child soldiers not only have to deal with their individual reintegration process and (psychological) healing; they equally face the challenges related to the aftermath of the war. The results of this study indicate that, in Northern Uganda, these challenges are largely related to instable governmental rule; corruption, a (assumed) lack of genuine investment in development and post-conflict recovery and the government’s lack of accountability for its own wrongdoing throughout the war and its aftermath. At the same time, comprehensive transitional justice mechanisms are currently lacking.