

Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army

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Summary

Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) emerged in northern Uganda when Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Movement was also active (see entry for Lakwena, Alice <<https://oxfordre.com/africanhistory/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277734-e-479>>). The groups had much in common, including spirit possession by their leaders. They were a response to the upheavals in the Acholi region following the seizing of political power in Uganda by Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Army in 1986. However, while Lakwena's forces were defeated in 1987, the LRA proved to be extraordinarily resilient. It has been more orientated to guerrilla tactics and acts of terror, including child abduction. LRA activities, combined with oppressive anti-insurgency operations by Museveni's government, resulted in forced displacement of over a million people. In 2003, the situation was recognized as one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world by the United Nations Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, and, in 2005, arrest warrants were issued for Joseph Kony and four other LRA commanders by the International Criminal Court. Peace negotiations began in 2006 but failed in 2008. The LRA then became active outside Uganda, in South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and the Central African Republic (CAR). Hundreds of local people were massacred, and thousands forced to flee their homes in 2008 and 2009. From 2008, the United States supported Ugandan military operations against the LRA, and US support was significantly increased from 2011. The scale of LRA violence declined from 2010, and in 2015, Dominic Ongwen, the only surviving LRA commander wanted by the International Criminal Court apart from Kony, was handed over for trial in The Hague, after being taken into custody by US forces. US and Ugandan forces were withdrawn in 2017, but Kony's subsequent efforts to reinvigorate the LRA were unsuccessful. While Kony remained at large, Dominic Ongwen's trial proceeded at the International Criminal Court. In February 2021, Ongwen was found guilty of sixty-one crimes (comprising crimes against humanity and war crimes). The judgment was a landmark ruling in terms of the successful prosecution of forced marriage and forced pregnancy. By 2020, Kony was living with a small band of followers, in a disputed territory between South Sudan and Sudan, bordering the Central African Republic, surviving by farming, and trading in local markets. He has reportedly abandoned his aim to overthrow the Ugandan government.

Keywords: spirit possession, northern Uganda, Kony, child combatants, International Criminal Court, forced displacement

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The Origins of the LRA

War and mass forced displacements in the region of northern Uganda and South Sudan have a history that goes back well before the establishment of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The lands on both banks of the Nile in what has become the Uganda–South Sudan border zone were

devastated from the 1850s by armed traders and adventurers arriving from the north. Their incursions were financed by the ivory trade, and there were large-scale abductions of young men as porters and soldiers, and young women as cooks and concubines. By the 1870s, the devastation was on a huge scale in local terms. The situation was complicated further by the arrival of hundreds of "Nubi" soldiers who were sent to the region to secure it for the Khedive of Egypt. Toward the end of the century, the region was also affected by newly introduced bovine and human diseases, leading to further migrations and changes in livelihood patterns. Upheavals continued after the turn of the 20th century, until a degree of stability was imposed by the Ugandan Protectorate and Anglo-Egyptian Condominium of the Sudan before and during the First World War.

On both sides of the border, local chiefs were appointed as agents, and where they did not exist, chiefs were created to fulfil this purpose. The British officers also used sleeping sickness control programs to move populations and concentrate them for administrative convenience. It was in this way that the Acholi, the "tribe" of Joseph Kony, and other "tribes" of the borderlands were divided into separate groups. The name Acholi may have been derived by British officials from the word for "black" in the Luo language (a language, or rather a cluster of languages, spoken by various groups that came to be classified as belonging to different "tribes," such as the Langi and Alur, as well as the Acholi). This does not mean that ethnic identities were absent before the establishment of British administration, but there is no doubt that indirect rule under colonial authorities helped forge identities that became much less fluid than hitherto. These points are important, because making assertions about the nature of Acholi society, suggesting that it existed in some kind of ideal "traditional" form in a past era, has been an important aspect of LRA ideology and also of the responses to the war among influential religious and cultural leaders.¹

Under British rule, there were fifty years of relative peace on both sides of the border, but systems of indirect rule using gazetted local languages tended to institutionalize divisions and give them an ethnic/tribal character. In Uganda, an important effect of the Protectorate administration was a division of the territory between the Bantu-speaking kingdoms of the south and the Nilotic- and Sudanic-speaking peoples of the north. It is a legacy that remains an impediment to the development of an integrated Ugandan nation. After independence, the first head of state was Milton Obote, who was a Lango, one of the Nilotic "tribes" that speaks a Luo language. In 1971, Obote was overthrown in a coup, led by his army commander, Idi Amin. Amin was a Muslim who came from the northwestern part of the country. One of his first acts was to murder Langi and Acholi soldiers in the army. Initially, he received considerable popular support in the south as well as from his home region, but this evaporated as the incompetence and brutality of his regime became increasingly apparent.

Amin was overthrown in 1979 following an invasion from Tanzania, and, as a result of what are generally agreed to have been flawed elections, Obote was returned to power in 1980. Some of those who had opposed Amin were unwilling to accept this outcome, including Yoweri Museveni. During the early 1980s, Museveni waged a guerrilla campaign against the government with support from his own region in the southwest, and also from the central south of the country, where there was widespread antipathy to what was perceived as northern domination. Much of

the fighting between Museveni's National Resistance Army (NRA) and the government's Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) was concentrated in the territory around the town of Luwero, north of Kampala. Obote also faced armed opposition in Amin's home area in the northwest.

The UNLA response to these insurgencies differed. In the northwest, a large part of the population was effectively forced out of the county. Many ended up in large refugee settlements in southern Sudan (now South Sudan) and Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo). In Luwero, however, there was no border nearby. Caught between the warring factions, local people were forced into camps and found themselves at the receiving end of the UNLA soldiers' frustrations. It is reported that thousands were killed, supposedly for collaboration with the NRA. The UNLA was nominally the national army, but northerners made up a large part of it, predominantly (although by no means exclusively) Langi and Acholi.

Eventually tensions opened up between the Acholi and Langi troops. The former complained they were usually the ones deployed to dangerous locations. In 1985, Acholi soldiers seized power from Obote, and Tito Okello became president. He immediately started negotiations with Museveni, and a peace agreement was signed in Nairobi, but the NRA proceeded to ignore it and marched on Kampala, establishing the National Resistance Movement government in 1986.

After their defeat in the south, many of the Acholi soldiers in the UNLA chose to move into Sudan (now South Sudan) to regroup. They were able to do this partly because there was an Acholi population in Sudan and their arrival was not altogether unwelcome. Many Sudanese Acholi were opposed to the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), perceiving it to be dominated by Dinka and other groups living to the north of their home area, so they joined or supported the Equatoria Defense Force (EDF), a militia resourced by the Sudanese government. Acholi veterans from Uganda were a useful source of reinforcement. Meanwhile, Museveni's forces asserted control over the Acholi areas of Uganda, but just as in Luwero, experiences of persecution by the new government's soldiers helped create a fertile base for guerrilla activity. Initially, the most important group resisting the NRA was the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA)—locally called *Cili*. This was a mainly conventional military force, largely made up of former UNLA soldiers. However, it was also at this point that spirit mediums began to play a significant role in the violence.

As in other parts of Africa, beliefs about the possession of individuals by ghosts or other metaphysical forces had become common. Partly as a consequence of dramatic social changes, local understandings about communication with the spirit world had expanded in ways that helped make sense of what was happening. They had also been profoundly affected by the introduction of Pentecostal Christianity. Numerous healers would mix Christian and local ideas in their séances, and some had considerable influence in their neighborhoods. Among the Acholi people they were called *ajwaki*, or sometimes *nebi*—the Swahili word for prophet. One such figure was a young woman called Alice Auma.

It is reported that she had become possessed by various spirits, including one usually known as *Lakwena*. In the upheavals that followed the victory of Museveni's forces in 1986, Alice's cult rapidly grew in size and importance (see entry for Lakwena, Alice <<https://oxfordre.com/>

[africanhistory/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277734-e-479>](#)).² She performed healing rituals for UNLA soldiers after their retreat from the south, and her spirits offered an interpretation of the UNLA defeat by the NRA that seemed compelling to many. She was able to cast out *cen*, the dangerous and polluting force or aura of those who had perpetrated or experienced violent acts, and it is said she loaded her followers with *malaika* (angels). She also explained that war is a form of healing through which people could be purified. The healing is on both sides, as those that die are like the rotten flesh cut out by a surgeon. The pure, however, could not be killed. Alice's movement came to be known as the Holy Spirit Mobile Forces. After several successes against the NRA in the Acholi region, it expanded to over 15,000 people. In 1987, a large number marched south, away from the Acholi parts of the county. They were eventually confronted near Jinja, where they were routed. Alice herself fled to Kenya, where she died in a refugee camp in 2007.

Back in the Acholi homeland, the UPDA continued its campaign from bases across the border in Sudan until it was drawn into negotiations. Most surrendered to the Ugandan government in 1988, but not all were prepared to accept the terms on offer. They joined a number of other groups, all of which were associated with individuals who were inspired by Alice Auma Lakwena's example. They included a group led by Alice's father Severino Lokoya until his capture in 1989, and another led by a young man called Joseph Kony.

It is often claimed that Kony is Alice's "cousin," or that they are from the same clan (*kaka*). However, Alice's father was a Madi migrant, so the patrilineal connection cannot be as close as has sometimes been suggested. Alice and Kony are said to have shared a grandfather on their mothers' side. Born in the early 1960s, Kony dropped out of primary education and was trained as an *ajwaka*. He was possessed by several spirits. In some accounts, he is claimed to have also been seized by Alice's *Lakwena* as well as the spirit of Juma Oris, a former minister in Idi Amin's regime. In late 1986 or early 1987, it is reported that he tried to form an alliance with Alice, but she rejected him. Kony was apparently humiliated, and his followers attacked and killed some of hers.

Kony's early campaign was mostly limited to the vicinity of his home area around Odek and the environs of Opit (where he had attended school, and where Alice Auma *Lakwena* had a base for a period in 1986/1987). However, this changed in 1988. In May, when President Museveni's government signed a peace agreement with the UPDA, many of those who were unwilling to surrender turned to Kony, including one of the UPDA's most effective commanders, Justine Odong Latek. From this point, Kony reportedly specialized in healing and divining, while Latek organized the armed forces. For a while, the group called itself the Uganda People's Democratic Liberation Army. Latek's influence on the movement was considerable, and Kony seems to have learned a great deal about guerrilla tactics. His ally was killed in battle, but by 1990, Kony's force was the only significant armed unit still fighting in the Acholi homelands. It was around the time of Latek's death that Kony adopted the title LRA.

Spirits and Political Objectives

It is not possible to give a straightforward outline of the LRA's purpose and objectives. They have shifted over time and have never been precise. Kony has had power and authority that are partly connected with his capacities as a spirit medium. The spirits who spoke to him or through him were perceived by many of those who came in contact with him as powerful. Particularly, in the early years, his agenda—or perhaps that of his spirits—was said to have been the liberation of the Acholi people from the oppression of President Museveni and the creation a new kind of Acholi (*cako Acholi manyen*) who would be cleansed/holy (*maleng*). His spirits (*tipu*) were often referred to as *cwiny maleng* (literally: clean heart), which were distinguished in some accounts from Alice Auma's *tipu maleng* (clean or holy spirit/s). In both cases, reference could be made to Kony and Auma, or their spirits, as *lakwena* (messenger). Many former LRA recruits who have been interviewed have expressed a degree of awe and fear with respect to Kony in this regard, and many would mention times when Kony's spirits would predict things through him which came true. There are also accounts of him being apparently out of control when his spirits were possessing him.

Unlike Alice Auma, whose family were Anglican, Kony had been brought up as a Catholic, and some Catholic clergy occasionally had contact with him in the 1990s and early 2000s. However, in 2003, Kony ordered the killing of priests and attacks on missions. Father Carlos Rodriguez, who became a target, observed the following:

Talking and listening to Kony (on the radio) is a horrible experience. He talks normally for a while and says he is your friend, and then starts screaming in a high voice. . . . In May 2003 he said . . . “kill all catholic priests.” Priests were attacked. Twelve missions were attacked in six weeks. I changed my place of residence every two days. When commanders told him of killings (of civilians) in Lira (District) he was laughing. He told them to kill more. His is mad . . .³

However, what came across as madness to Fr. Carlos is reported to have seemed like spiritual inspiration to many who came in contact with Kony. It is one reason why the LRA has survived for so long, and why a residual respect for Kony can be discerned in some former combatants. Particularly, when those returning from the LRA first came back, there were many who stated that they believed Kony could know what they were thinking.

Nevertheless, the LRA's spiritual qualities should not be exaggerated. Odong Latek and other veteran soldiers in the LRA are likely to have had more secular agendas, similar to those of the UPDA (i.e., to remove President Museveni from power and to return to something like the governance of Uganda in the early 1980s). That was also probably the case with Otti Lagony, another veteran soldier, who became second in command, until he was demoted in 1997 and eventually killed in 1999. Interestingly, there are stories that Kony's spirits abandoned him from that time, and he began to act like a more normal kind of military leader—although other accounts suggest that he continued to be advised by spirits in dreams and occasionally would start shouting things in the manner described by Fr. Carlos.

Vincent Otti replaced Lagony as second in command and again had a more overtly conventional approach to political objectives, although without setting aside the moral and spiritual qualities of the LRA. He was loquacious about such matters when he was the main facilitator of communication with the LRA in 2005 and 2006, and would present himself as representing something like the political wing of the movement. This eventually became too much for Kony, who appears to have become concerned about Otti's links with international agencies. He was arrested and killed in October 2007.

What might be termed conventional political statements of the LRA's purpose and objectives were first circulated in the mid- to late 1990s. People would be stopped by LRA sympathizers at road blocks and given written manifestos. Some of these were quite elaborate, and became more so by the end of the decade. For example, Sverker Finnström, who was researching in the region at the time, was given a substantial pamphlet, as well as two printed one-page documents in Acholi, which were signed by Kollo Sam (In 2005, Kollo surrendered to the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) and was granted amnesty. He claimed that his role in the LRA had just been as "spokesman" and "negotiator"). There were also audio tapes circulating, with Kony speaking. Finnström recalls that one was on HIV/AIDS and was rather elaborate, if inaccurate, in its treatment of the disease.⁴ In addition, Kony rang the Gulu-based FM radio station to put across a political argument in 2002, saying that he wanted genuine peace talks with the government, following a ceasefire that he had initiated.

There has been considerable disagreement about the authenticity of the LRA's written manifestos. It is often claimed that they reflected views of Acholi in the diaspora or of Acholi politicians, rather than the LRA who were fighting in the bush. Also, news media, many international activists, several aid agencies, and Ugandan government officials have persistently emphasized the bizarre, violent, and apparently incomprehensible aspects of the LRA, discounting any suggestion of a coherent policy agenda. It is certainly a challenge to reconcile the statements made in the manifestos with the LRA's brutal attacks on local people in northern Uganda, who have mostly (although not exclusively) been of Kony's own Acholi ethnic identity. In addition, the more conventional political assertions in the manifestos contradict the reports of many of those who have returned from the LRA (i.e., that Kony wanted to create some new sort of spiritually and morally pure Acholi [*cako Acholi manyen*] through violent social cleansing).

However, the manifestos did reflect the arguments later presented by the LRA delegation in the peace talks held in Juba, South Sudan. The statements made tended to distance the LRA from its well-known spiritual aspects. The most elaborate one was an eighteen-page printed pamphlet that was in circulation from around 1999, and which is said to have been produced after discussion with LRA sympathizers in the diaspora who met with Kony in southern Sudan. Ostensibly, signed by Kony himself, it noted that members of the LRA were "ordinary and practicing Christians," but that they were not "Christian Fundamentalists." It went on to claim that Museveni's government was committed to the "annihilation of certain selected ethnic groups considered to be undesirable or what the regime terms as biological substances" and that it had a secret agenda to establish a Tutsi Empire. The LRA agenda was then outlined. This included establishing a government of national unity and reconciliation, and the full restoration

of political pluralism and multi-party democracy. There were also descriptions of economic programs, and education, agriculture, health, land, natural resources, infrastructure, commerce and industry, and defense policies.

When interviewed in 2006, Kony gave the impression of doing his best to follow the lines of argument outlined in this “1999” manifesto, and which Otti had been elaborating in telephone calls and discussions with peace activists. He tried to present the LRA as a conventional kind of guerrilla movement with political objectives: “. . . we have done our manifesto. . . . Our political agenda, our manifest[o] is open . . .” He explicitly rejected the idea that spirits or God dictated his actions. He received advice from spiritual forces, but the LRA were “fighting for the Ten Commandments.”

Somewhat unconvincingly, Kony also denied abducting children or killing or mutilating people. President Museveni, he explained, wanted:

. . . to destroy all Acholi so that the land of Acholi is his land. . . . We are soldiers . . . I am a freedom fighter who is fighting for the freedom of Uganda. But I am not a terrorist. . . . We want the people of Uganda to be free. . . . We are fighting for democracy. . . . We should be free to elect our leader . . .

He additionally made this interesting observation:

In a war, it is very difficult to say that this man is fighting [a] clean war. This man is fighting a dirty war. It is very difficult to tell. Because one man can say that [their enemy] is Satan . . . to let people see him as a bad person. . . . I cannot say that we are fighting a clean war . . . [while] Museveni is fighting a dirty war. . . . Because a clean war is known by God only. Is known by God, not by us. This is what I know.⁵

Military Tactics and Atrocities

Continuing to work with a fairly small group, Kony's forces maintained a guerrilla campaign against the government and, increasingly, against anyone who collaborated with it. The size of the LRA is a matter of speculation. One estimate from 1997 suggests 3,000 to 4,000 armed combatants—as opposed to people who had been recruited or abducted and were living with the LRA as wives, farmers, porters, and servants.⁶ Others are much lower, and some estimates from the mid-1990s are much higher.⁷ The confusion arises partly because (a) the size of the LRA has fluctuated, (b) its main bases were located in Sudan (now South Sudan), and (c) the Ugandan government repeatedly dismissed the LRA as a militarily insignificant bunch of criminals. The number of LRA soldiers actually operating in northern Uganda from across the Sudan border at any one time is reported to have rarely been more than a few hundred. Accounts from those who returned from the LRA have described how these operated in small groups, under the command of officers who had variable approaches to recruitment and attacks, but shared a strong sense of personal loyalty to Kony and mostly followed his orders.

Large numbers of combatants were not necessary, because the LRA mostly avoided pitched battles with government forces but used terror tactics to maximum effect. Like Alice, Kony claimed that Acholi society had to be purified by violence, but he was much more prone to specifically target noncombatants, and his forces specialized in performing shocking atrocities on a few individuals (such as cutting of the lips of victims), spreading fear in the population as a whole. The LRA also became associated with forced recruitment or abductions, often of children. Over the years, thousands of people have been incorporated into the movement in this way, mainly from Acholi areas, but also from Langi, Madi, and Teso, and more recently from areas in South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Central African Republic. Some have been forced to perform atrocious acts, such as killing relatives and other abductees, as part of their initiation.

The Uganda government's response to the LRA shifted back and forth between negotiation and military offensives. From the time of the peace agreement with the UPDA in 1988, President Museveni, in particular, persistently downplayed what was happening. It was hard to accept that a spirit cult without a clearly articulated political agenda—or at least a very strange one—could sustain resistance against the well-organized and well-trained NRA. From the late 1980s, it was felt that the war should have been over, and indeed the government frequently claimed that it was. President Museveni's confidence is reflected in the appointment in 1988 of Betty Bigombe as Minister of State for Pacification of Northern Uganda, resident in Gulu.

In 1991, an intensive four-month military operation was mounted called Operation North, the main effect of which seems to have been to antagonize and alienate noncombatants. Betty Bigombe attempted to walk a middle ground, trying to keep the door open for negotiation and restrict the NRA's depredations but also introducing some vigorous anti-insurgency measures, such as arming community defense groups called "arrow brigades." The LRA's response was ever more violent. Hundreds of people thought to be government collaborators, such as those spreading alarms when the LRA were in the vicinity or simply not being openly supportive, were maimed or killed. LRA "punishments" included the amputation of limbs and the cutting of lips, noses, and ears. In discussions with Bigombe in 1994, Kony justified LRA actions as follows:

If you picked up an arrow against us and we ended up cutting off the hand you used, who is to blame? You report us with your mouth, and we cut off your lips. Who is to blame? It is you! The Bible says that if your hand, eye or mouth is at fault, it should be cut off.⁸

The NRA (which became the UPDF—the Uganda People's Defence Force—in the mid-1990s) seemed reluctant to provide protection, and Bigombe's lightly armed "arrow brigades" were especially vulnerable. Thousands of people sought refuge in the towns.

Nevertheless, in 1994, Bigombe's strategy of keeping a certain distance from all interest groups but being willing to talk to anyone seemed to pay off, and she managed to engage the LRA in peace talks. These seemed very promising. She went out into the bush without any protection for negotiations. Most of those who went with her on the first occasion were so terrified by the experience that they refused to go again. In the course of four more meetings with Kony, she arranged an uneasy ceasefire, and LRA soldiers were even able to visit and stay at some of the

trading centers. It looked like there was a real prospect for a peace agreement. However, President Museveni's attitude to the talks was not very enthusiastic, and at a political rally in February 1994, he issued an ultimatum to the rebels. The LRA were given seven days to put down their weapons and turn themselves over to government forces. Within three days of the announcement, the killing resumed.

President Museveni claimed that he had received military intelligence showing that the LRA were only involved in peace negotiations in order to build up their military capacity, and that they had secured assistance from the government of Sudan. Maybe this is true, but there were additional factors. Although expensive, the war in the north had certain political advantages for his government. The upheavals were contained in a part of the country in which he had no power base. In addition, the horrific violence and strange spirituality of the LRA allowed his government to present the north as a kind of barbaric periphery. He used this to present himself to people in the south as the guarantee that the oppressions of Amin, Obote, and Okello would not return. President Museveni himself is from the southwest, and some people in Buganda were eager to replace him with one of their own. But who else would protect them from the Acholi and other "wild" northerners? So it was not necessarily in President Museveni's interest to resolve the war by negotiation, and the much-publicized barbarism of the LRA had its political uses. Also, the war in the north kept the army occupied and benefited many soldiers economically. Certain senior officers are well known to have become wealthy from the situation.

An anti-insurgency strategy adopted by the Ugandan government was to remove the population from rural areas where they might assist the rebels, either out of choice or due to fear of what would happen to them if they did not. In some instances, such removals are claimed to have been violently enforced. By the turn of the 1990s, much of the population was concentrated near the towns and trading centers. From the mid-1990s, following the collapse of Bigombe's negotiations, a more systematic policy was adopted of moving people into internal displacement (IDP) camps. Scores of these were set up. They were supposed to be protected by small groups of UPDF soldiers and "local defence units" under UPDF command—who replaced Bigombe's "arrow boys." Cultivation was almost impossible, and movement outside of the camps strictly limited. Food and other commodities were provided by aid agencies such as the World Food Programme. By the end of the 1990s, about half a million people were living in the camps.

Although there was little overt enthusiasm for the LRA among the mass of the Ugandan Acholi population, it had never depended on such support, and from the period of the failed peace negotiations in the mid-1990s, a generous line of assistance was indeed offered from Sudan. The Sudanese government had decided to assist the LRA in retaliation for the Uganda government's barely disguised support for the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). In effect, the LRA became one of the many militias sponsored by the Sudanese government through which it waged war in the south by proxy; and from the mid-1990s, the LRA was directly engaged in fighting the SPLA on behalf of President Omar Bashir's regime in Khartoum, as well as launching attacks into Uganda against the Ugandan army and civilians. For this, a much larger armed force was necessary, and this was one of the reasons why the LRA expanded its policy of abduction. With Sudanese support, the LRA was able to launch some of its most ferocious attacks. One of the worst

single incidents occurred in May 1995, when the LRA burned scores of homes and killed some 300 people in Atiak, a trading center just south of a large army barracks. As on other occasions, the Ugandan government soldiers failed to respond until the rebels had already withdrawn.

A year after that massacre, the LRA announced a brief ceasefire during the Ugandan presidential elections. They even offered to stop fighting completely if President Museveni lost. In the event, he won with a huge majority, although he received few votes in the north. Betty Bigombe had continued to maintain contact with the LRA after the collapse in the peace negotiations in 1994, and there were attempts made by a group of Acholi elders from Gulu to negotiate at the time of the elections, but these failed hopelessly. (Two elders were murdered by the LRA.) Always a controversial figure, Bigombe was dropped from President Museveni's cabinet in June 1996. She left Gulu and was replaced as Minister Alfonse Chicamoy Owiny-Dollo. Meanwhile, Norbert Mao was elected to parliament as Gulu MP and, together with a group of other Acholi opposition MPs, campaigned for the Ugandan parliament to formally investigate the situation in the north. There was also lobbying for a blanket amnesty that would cover all Uganda's rebel groups, including the LRA. Support for this was intense from civil society groups in the north, including religious leaders. Overcoming opposition from President Museveni, an Amnesty Act was enacted in January 2000. However, after prolonged discussion, the inquiry into the situation in the north ended up accepting the view that the military option should continue to be pursued. In addition, the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2002 appeared to set limits to the amnesty. Anti-insurgency operations continued, culminating with the "Iron Fist" offensives.

During the late 1990s, international pressure increased on President Bashir's government in Sudan. The Clinton administration in the United States declared Sudan to be a terrorist state because of the government's alleged role in an assassination attempt on President Mubarak of Egypt, and for providing a base to Osama bin Laden—who was believed to be responsible for the bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998. By the end of the decade, President Bashir was trying to build bridges with his neighbors and was doubtless alarmed by the US missile attack on what was asserted to be a chemical weapons factory in a suburb of Khartoum in August 1998. In 1999, his government decided to ask former US President Carter to become involved, in the hope of normalizing external relations. At this time there had been media coverage of abductions in northern Uganda by the LRA, notably of the "Aboke girls"—a group of school girls abducted by the LRA from their dormitory at St. Mary's College in Lira District in October 1996.⁹ The Carter Center set about trying to persuade the Sudanese government to stop supporting the LRA and managed to broker a deal between Presidents Bashir and Museveni whereby they agreed to stop supporting cross-border rebel groups (although, in practice, they continued to do so). International pressure on Sudan was further intensified following the attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, and by the inclusion of the LRA in the USA Patriot Act Terrorist Exclusion List. As a consequence, the Sudanese government was persuaded to give permission for the so-called "Iron Fist" incursions from Uganda, which officially started in March 2002.

President Museveni directed the first Iron Fist campaign from a base in the north. With US logistical support, and using helicopter gunships, an estimated 10,000 Ugandan troops were involved. LRA bases in Sudan were destroyed and hundreds of people killed. The Ugandan government called those who died "rebels," but many had been abducted by the LRA, often as

children. Whatever military objectives were attained in Sudan (now South Sudan), for northern Uganda, Operation Iron Fist proved to be a social disaster. Kony and almost all of his senior commanders evaded capture, and as fast as abducted people were killed, captured, freed, or escaped, others were taken. The LRA was also able to outflank the UPDF/SPLA forces and expanded their campaign in new parts of northern Uganda, including Lira, Soroti, Apac, and Katakwi districts, where a series of LRA attacks and atrocities displaced huge numbers of people.

By early 2003, more than one and half million people were crammed into the IDP camp, where conditions deteriorated.¹⁰ In 2003, following a visit to the region, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs called it “the biggest neglected humanitarian disaster in the world” and “a moral outrage.”¹¹ Several months earlier the situation had been referred to the newly established International Criminal Court (ICC), and ICC investigations had been underway since July, leading to arrest warrants for Kony and senior LRA commanders in 2005 (Vincent Otti, Okot Odhiambo, Dominic Ongwen, and Raska Lukwiya).

These developments prompted considerable international interest and led to lobbying about the plight of Ugandan children, notably in the United States. A group of young activists established Invisible Children in 2004 and made emotionally charged and influential videos about the effects of the LRA conflict, which were very widely viewed. A proliferation of additional aid agencies became active on the ground, and media coverage was expanded. A fictional LRA commander even appeared in a James Bond film (*Casino Royale*) in 2006.

Also in that year, the LRA were drawn into peace negotiations, which were hosted in Juba, the capital of southern Sudan (which at the time was still formally part of Sudan). The negotiations produced an agreement, which Kony then refused to sign.¹² The LRA subsequently became active in South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Central African Republic.

Reporting of events in the United States, and campaigns by activists, prompted deployment of US military personnel to assist in efforts to contain the LRA at the end of 2011, and in the following year Invisible Children released “Kony 2012,” which called for US intervention to arrest Joseph Kony.¹³ The video went viral, with more than 100 million views in just six days, after being tweeted by famous celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey. The video presented a shocking and alarming view of what was happening.¹⁴ While many of the points it made were wildly inaccurate, there is no doubt that the population of northern Uganda, and populations beyond Uganda's borders, had been severely affected by the LRA.

Effects of the LRA Conflict in Uganda

Despite Joseph Kony's denials in 2006 about the LRA perpetrating atrocities, including mutilations and killings of noncombatants and the forced recruitment of children, there is no doubt that they occurred. There are numerous shocking reports of specific incidents. However, research on the region that has worked with large samples tells a somewhat different story from the sensational media accounts of LRA barbarism and the focus on the worst incidents by human rights groups.

With respect to the recruitment of children from the region by the LRA, UNICEF data on all reported “abductions” between 1990 and 2001 suggests a total number of 28,903.¹⁵ Close to a third of these were children, and most of the others were young adults. The system of reporting broke down in 2002, but in 2005 UNICEF estimated that a further 10,000 children had probably been abducted since that point. Others have proposed a much higher number. Pham et al., for example, estimated that the LRA had abducted between 24,000 and 37,000 Ugandan children by 2006, whereas Blattman and Annan have proposed a figure as high as 66,000 for children and young adults up to the age of 30.¹⁶ A large number of these people have subsequently returned to the region through a reception center process, which was initiated in 1995. In mid-2005, it was found that around 26,000 had come back in that way, with around 20,000 arriving since the UPDF moved across the border with Sudan in 2002 and attacked the LRA's main bases.¹⁷

The experiences of those who had spent time with the LRA varied widely. On the one hand, there were those who were ordered to kill their relatives and friends, carry around severed heads, lick the blood of the dead, carry very heavy loads, and fight the UPDF (or the SPLA in South Sudan). There were also many girls who were made to “marry” LRA commanders against their will, bringing their babies back with them. Kony himself is reported to have had over 140 children from such forced “wives.” On the other hand, there were those who spoke about their experiences with the LRA more positively. Some contrasted the freedom of life in the bush with the constraints imposed upon them back home. Even some of the women who were given to LRA commanders as “wives” were surprisingly accepting of their experiences—perhaps because they had little choice.¹⁸

A systematic survey of war-affected youths in Kitgum and Pader districts in 2005 and 2006 found that the majority of those who spent time with the LRA did not directly experience things like the forced commission of violence or abuse of dead bodies. Rather, the LRA seems to have focused on abduction of adolescents and young adults because they could be inculcated with the LRA's ideologies, including loyalty to Kony. The strategies to do this were primarily disorientation, the threat of violence, and political propaganda. The results of this survey indicated that the LRA “was more strategic and coldly rational in its tactics than is commonly supposed.”¹⁹ This may well be a more accurate assessment than claims that the LRA is irrational or mad.

However, other researchers who have spent a long time talking with people who have returned from the LRA suggest that a large percentage were in fact compelled to kill or at least witness very shocking incidents. Often this did not become apparent when asking them a series of pre-set questions in a structured questionnaire survey. In numerous cases, the initial accounts given of abduction experiences by respondents avoided mention of things that continue to haunt their dreams and lived experiences. There was a widespread perception that those who have returned were affected by *cen* (the kind of harmful emanation associated with individuals who have been involved in very violent circumstances). Findings from an ongoing follow-up of those young people who returned from the LRA through the aid agency-funded reception centers revealed that quite a high number agreed with this perception themselves. Over 20 percent of former LRA recruits have been found to be affected by *cen* ten or more years after their return. Others talk about being disturbed by the spirits (*tipu*) of those who died. Almost all of them are struggling to deal with what happened to them, especially those living in rural locations.²⁰

They additionally experience multiple forms of abuse and hostility. When large numbers were returning from the LRA in 2004 and 2005, there was much talk about reconciliation and “forgiveness” (*timo kica*) with former LRA combatants and formerly abducted children, and encouragement to perform particular rituals associated with social repair, notably *mato oput* and *nyono tong gweno*. There were many instances recorded where returning children seemed to be welcomed by their parents, even if they were occasionally called bad names by other relatives and by their neighbors. Research carried out since 2012 suggests that, in most cases, efforts at social reintegration in families have proved difficult to sustain, and experiences of rejection have become worse over time. Matters can be particularly bad for women who brought back children “from the bush,” whose fathers were LRA commanders.²¹

Meanwhile, much of the rest of the population of the LRA-affected areas of northern Uganda have also continued to suffer the consequences of the war. Hundreds of thousands of people have lived for years in appalling circumstances in poorly protected and resourced displacement camps. An idea of how dreadful these camps were can be gleaned from the crude mortality rates recorded in some of them by Médecins Sans Frontières and the World Health Organization in 2004 and 2005.²² They were of an order that might be anticipated in an extreme humanitarian emergency.

A consequence of these developments and the international publicity about LRA atrocities was growing support for those who had been promoting amnesty as the best way of ending the fighting. Efforts were made to contact the LRA in the bush and to persuade them that if they surrendered, they would not be punished for anything they had done. FM radio programs broadcast from Gulu were one of the methods used. Not surprisingly, the offer was treated with skepticism by LRA commanders, but a system was put in place with aid agency funding for those returning from the LRA to be reintegrated into their communities. By mid-2004, around 5,000 adults had passed through this system and been given amnesty certificates. This was partly the result of the Sudanese government agreeing to a second Iron Fist offensive from March 2004. This campaign proved more effective than the first one in terms of forcing the LRA commanders to abandon or release many of their recruits, as well as their own families in some cases. Nevertheless, terrible crimes were perpetrated in 2004 by the LRA, including the atrocities in May and June at Pagak, Lukodi, and Abok.

In 2005, partly because of the referral of the situation to the ICC, the LRA again expressed interest in peace negotiations, with Vincent Otti taking a leading role. That led to the peace talks, which took place in Juba, South Sudan, between 2006 and 2008. When Otti was allegedly killed and the talks failed to result in a signed agreement, an attack was launched on the LRA base in Garamba, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and LRA attacks resumed in 2008. However, the LRA did not launch renewed attacks in northern Uganda, and the region has enjoyed a period of peace. Nevertheless, the legacy of the LRA war remains significant. Apart from the ongoing problems facing the thousands who were at different times recruited by the LRA, the population as a whole had mostly been displaced. In the Acholi districts, much of the population has grown up in displacement camps, and at the time the camps were dismantled from 2007, the population was huge. If over a million people had suddenly crossed an international border, it would have been considered a major emergency. In northern Uganda, around that number of people were effectively displaced from their displacement camps.

Many families have returned to former farms, but land conflicts have been intense.²³ With the breakdown in normal patterns of marriage, as a result of life in the internal displacement camps where people were concentrated in densely packed locations without access to resources, enormous numbers of children have been born to mothers for whom no bride price had been transferred. That has made the lineage status of children, and their mothers' access to land, a matter of difficult negotiation. Some have had to take their children to their father's land in the hope that their brothers will welcome them and give them access to plots to farm. Others who have sustained a relationship with the father of their children go to his father's home, again with the hope that plots will be allocated to them. Often the negotiations are fraught and can be insurmountable where a woman's children have various biological fathers. In many instances children have been left with their grandmother or some other relative. Others have been left at orphanages. The high number of rapes that have been recorded by researchers, the vast majority of which are never reported to any public authorities, is symptomatic of the deep social problems that persist.²⁴ So is the emergence of vigilante groups, which provide informal policing, sometimes with recourse to violent enforcement.²⁵ With reference to locations affected by the LRA conflict, a recent UNDP report has observed that:

The economic and development plight of Northern Uganda cannot be overlooked. . . . Long after the war, there are still unaddressed legacies of the conflict, in various dimensions of wellbeing. Among them the growing youth population who have missed their early education and have limited opportunities for decent and gainful employment.²⁶

There has been a generation or more that survived in dreadful conditions, next to overflowing latrines, unable to access adequate education or healthcare, dependent on food distributions from aid agencies. They lived in abject poverty and continuous fear of the LRA—and sometimes of the UPDF too. It is a world that has aptly been described as “social torture,” and humanitarian organizations that helped establish and sustain the displacement camps have been much criticized.²⁷ Those circumstances have changed, and there have been improvements in livelihoods. Nevertheless, the legacies will take many years to overcome, and there is little sense that either domestic processes in Uganda or the ICC will offer justice to those who have suffered.²⁸

The LRA Now and the ICC Prosecution

While the peace negotiations were occurring in Juba, the LRA were based in a South Sudan neighboring location in the DRC. In 2008, as it became apparent that Kony was not going to sign an agreement, the LRA began attacks on the local populations. In September, 161 pupils were abducted in Duru, DRC, and over a hundred people were killed. In a meeting with Kony that followed soon afterward, his rejection of the Juba arrangements was confirmed, and in December, the Ugandan army launched an offensive called Operation Lightning Thunder. This was based on a new security agreement with the DRC and the government of southern Sudan, supported with

US advisors. However, the LRA escaped and responded with a series of massacres. By mid-January 2009, the LRA had killed around 900 civilians in DRC and Sudan, and more than 400,000 people had fled their homes.²⁹

LRA killings and abductions continued throughout 2009, causing mayhem disproportionate to its actual size. Dominic Ongwen, one of the LRA leaders wanted by the ICC, was reported to have been acting as overall second in command, and the United States offered a large reward for his capture. Ongwen was overseeing operations in DRC, deploying 200 fighters in groups of seven to ten. In June, other sections of the LRA, comprising about 200 armed fighters, crossed into the Central African Republic (CAR). Approximately 50 of these were operating directly under Joseph Kony. During this period, the LRA resumed the practice of abducting children and adults to fill its ranks and provide labor as porters and farmers. It was estimated that 1,400 people had been abducted by the LRA, with 800 still captive. More than two-thirds of these were reported to be children. In 2010, reports of LRA violence greatly reduced, reportedly on Kony's orders to keep a low profile, perhaps due to concerns about the deployment of US military personnel, but also because Operation Lightning Thunder had caused LRA groups to splinter and disperse, making coordination a challenge. Also, some LRA combatants have defected to other militia operating in eastern DRC, whereas others were killed or captured. Kony himself moved to South Darfur in Sudan in 2012, and then the border areas of Sudan and South Sudan.

From this point, small groups of LRA operated separately, with some reportedly engaged in occasional trading in diamonds and ivory.³⁰ Attacks on local populations were limited to forcibly collecting food and short-term abductions. LRA-associated violence declined to what was assessed as an all-time low in 2012, the year after additional US forces were deployed by President Obama in response to US domestic pressure from activists, and at the time that Invisible Children's viral campaign had called for US intervention to arrest Kony and hand him over to the ICC. In July 2013, it was estimated that there were around 500 people left in the LRA, of whom about 250 were armed fighters. However, estimates of the military strength of the LRA have always been hard to verify, particularly where the LRA has been operational in places where other militia groups are active. An estimate from 2017 suggested that there were only 120 remaining in the LRA, with roughly 80 fighters carrying arms. In that year, after reportedly spending more than \$780 million on anti-LRA activities, the United States withdrew its military support.³¹ However, Dominic Ongwen had by then been handed over for trial in The Hague, with facilitation by US forces. Apart from Kony, he was the only surviving LRA commander wanted by the ICC. Raska Lukwiya had reportedly died in combat in 2006; Vincent Otti had been assassinated on Kony's orders in 2007; and Okot Odhiambo had been killed in October 2013, possibly after trying to negotiate impunity if he surrendered.

Ongwen had apparently moved to join Kony at his base camp in South Sudan, where they had an argument. Fearing he would be executed like Vincent Otti, Ongwen fled, crossing into CAR, where he eventually was picked up by a Seleka militia group, who contacted a US military base at Obo. A helicopter was sent to pick him up, and he was then handed over to CAR and Ugandan forces, and finally to the ICC. A film captured that moment. He appeared understandably confused about what was going on.³² There is no report of the offered reward actually being paid for his arrest.

Ongwen first appeared in court in The Hague in January 2015, and pre-trial hearings commenced a year later. His trial started in December 2016 and was concluded in March 2021. The trial was a landmark in the way that sexual and gender-based crimes were highlighted. Fatou Bensouda, the chief prosecutor of the ICC, observed in her pre-trial brief: "Women were treated as spoils of war, awarded as prizes without any more say in the matter than if they had been animals or inanimate objects."³³ Vulnerable female witnesses were allowed to testify away from public proceedings, and seven women who were allocated to Ongwen's household provided evidence of the continuing harm they experience in terms of stigma and trauma, following forced marriage, torture, rape, sexual slavery, enslavement, and forced pregnancy. In February 2021, the ICC judges pronounced their verdict, finding Ongwen guilty of sixty-one crimes, comprising both crimes against humanity and war crimes. The successful prosecution of forced pregnancy and forced marriage, in particular, was hailed as a benchmark in international criminal justice. However, not everyone was convinced that justice was done. While it is hard to deny that Ongwen was associated with heinous acts, he was not the only one, or arguably the worst offender. He was abducted himself as a child, and some have argued that he was not fully responsible for his choices. Also, concerns have been expressed that the ICC prosecution has deflected attention away from the Ugandan government's responsibilities for alleged human rights violations and failure to protect the population. Whatever the legal significance of the case, few who were affected by the LRA war expect restitution for their suffering.³⁴

Meanwhile, Joseph Kony himself remains at large. The efforts by US and Ugandan armed forces to capture him failed, and their operations against the LRA ended in early 2017. However, by that time the LRA had splintered into small groups and was estimated to have declined in size by over 75 percent. It is reported that orders were given by Kony to forcibly recruit more members in 2018, and over 250 young people were abducted in the following months, but efforts to reinvigorate the LRA have not been successful. By 2020, Kony had, it seems, given up trying to command LRA factions operating in the CAR and DRC, and, allegedly, had abandoned ambitions to overthrow the Ugandan government. He was living in Kafia Kingi, a disputed territory between South Sudan and Sudan, bordering the CAR. He had a few dozen followers, including two of his sons, and the group was surviving by farming and sometimes selling honey in local markets.³⁵

Conclusion

Joseph Kony's LRA has been a remarkably resilient armed group that has been active for over thirty years. It began as a faction linked to a cult, aiming to create a "new Acholi" (*Acholi manyen*) following the overthrow of the Acholi President of Uganda, Tito Okello, in 1986 by Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Army. Kony was possessed with powerful spirits and was feared and admired by his followers. While other groups were defeated by Museveni's army in the late 1980s, the LRA persisted, operating from across the border in what was at that time Sudan. After the failure of peace talks in 2008, the LRA moved west—to the borders of South Sudan, CAR, and DRC, where they terrorized local populations. The LRA has been less active since 2010. Nevertheless, while other senior LRA commanders have died or, in Ongwen's case, been prosecuted at the ICC, Kony has not surrendered and continues to avoid capture.

The longevity of the LRA presents a conundrum to many observers. The suggestion that the Acholi people could in some way be cleansed by extraordinarily violent acts appears bizarre. However, the LRA manifesto that Kony emphasized in 2006 struck most analysts as muddled, manifestly unrealistic, and probably something that was probably introduced or encouraged by sympathizers living in Europe and North America. The mixture of conventional guerrilla tactics with acts of terror are not unique to the LRA but can still seem bewildering, especially as atrocities were deliberately targeted at Kony's own people. The periodic expansion and retraction in the LRA's size is unusual too.

It is hard to explain how Kony exerted so much control over so many forcibly recruited people for so long without recognizing that the spirit world is important to people in this region of Africa. Possession is widespread, not least within the Christian churches, and fear of dangerous or evil spiritual forces is real. Magical things can be the stuff of daily life and are experienced as an aspect of lived realities in ways that can seem hard to comprehend by outside observers. Pollution by harmful spiritual emanations (*cen*) is a continuing issue for those who returned from the LRA, and those who were adversely affected by LRA attacks. Moreover, Kony's current decline in influence is interpreted by some as being as much to do with an erosion of his spiritual powers than the activities of, for example, US armed forces.

Legacies of the LRA remain important for the population of northern Uganda and more widely. The return of families to their old farms, and the accommodation of young people coming back from the LRA, or who spent their childhood in displacement camps, has been fraught with difficulties, and rural poverty is widespread. It is possible that the successful conviction of Dominic Ongwen will have far-reaching consequences in other places where appalling sexual and gender-based crimes occur, but his imprisonment seems like very partial justice in the Acholi region. Comprehensive restitution for the Acholi and neighboring populations affected by the LRA's actions and the Ugandan government's anti-insurgency responses is a largely unrealistic aspiration. However, the prosecution of Kony at the ICC in The Hague remains possible, so long as he remains alive. A question in the mind of many is why he is not already being tried. He has moved about to avoid capture, but, given that his precise whereabouts have sometimes been known, and given the surveillance capacities of those who have been looking for him, perhaps the biggest conundrum is why he is still at large.

Discussion of the Literature

The first published discussions of the LRA occurred as part of studies focused on Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirit Movement—for example, “Understanding Alice: Uganda's Holy Spirit Movement in Context” (Allen 1991), and see the relevant entry in this encyclopedia by Heike Behrend <<https://oxfordre.com/africanhistory/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277734-e-479>>. More detailed work that specifically deals with Joseph Kony and the LRA appeared in the later 1990s, including a substantial USAID report, *The Anguish of Northern Uganda* (Gersony 1997), which provided a comprehensive general overview.

In the early 2000s, interest in the LRA greatly increased, and publications proliferated. These included Tim Allen's book, *Trial Justice: The International Criminal Court and the Lord's Resistance Army* (2006), which described the emergence of the LRA, atrocities perpetrated on the region, and the role of the potential role of the International Criminal Court. The edited collection by Allen and Vlassenroot, *The Lord's Resistance Army: Myth and Reality* (2010), brought together insights from most of the scholars working on the LRA at the time.

Also notable were detailed accounts of life in the LRA-affected region of northern Uganda, particularly those by Finnström (*Living with Bad Surroundings: War, History, and Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda*, 2008), Dolan (*Social Torture: The Case of Northern Uganda*, 2009), Branch (*Displacing Human Rights: War and Intervention in Northern Uganda*, 2011), Baines (*Buried in the Heart: Women, Complex Victimhood and the War in Northern Uganda*, 2016), Porter (*After Rape: Justice and Social Harmony in Northern Uganda*, 2016), and Dubal (*Against Humanity: Lessons from the Lord's Resistance Army*, 2018).

The first three of these books described and analyzed aspects of the LRA's activities and the mass forced displacement of the population of central northern Uganda up until 2006. Branch was particularly critical of humanitarian agencies. The other three books dealt with the livelihoods of people affected by the war, including people who were recruited by the LRA. Dubal's book is an outlier in that it offered by far the most sympathetic assessment of the LRA, going so far as to suggest that accounts of LRA atrocities are exaggerated or invented.

Matthew Green's *The Wizard of the Nile* is a journalist's account of his efforts to meet and interview Joseph Kony. That interview was secured by Mareike Schomerus, and when Green did eventually meet Kony himself, it was an anti-climax. In the end, Green suggested, it was his journey that was more revealing.

The book by Adam Dolnik and Herman Butime (*Understanding the Lord's Resistance Army Insurgency*, 2017) drew heavily on accounts by journalists, rather than the more academic scholarship highlighted previously in this section but provided a balanced general overview of the LRA conflict and was usefully detailed about the LRA's organization and military capacities.

The PhD thesis by Marieke Schomerus, *Even Eating You Can Bite Your Tongue: Dynamics and Challenges of the Juba Peace Talks with the Lord's Resistance Army* (2012), discussed in detail the peace negotiations in Juba between 2006 and 2008, and Allen et al. "What Happened to Children Who Returned from the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda?" (2020) provided an assessment of the long-term experiences of children who returned from periods of recruitment by the LRA.

The personal account by Evelyn Amony, *I Am Evelyn Amony: Reclaiming My Life from the Lord's Resistance Army* (2015), provided a troubling narrative by a woman who was taken by Joseph Kony for enforced marriage and became his favorite wife. Caroline Lamwaka was an intrepid Ugandan journalist. Her book, *The Raging Storm: A Reporter's Inside Account of Northern Uganda War 1986-2005*, was published posthumously, edited from her numerous insightful essays and reports on northern Uganda between 1986 and 2005 (Lamkawa 2016).

An interesting aspect of the LRA is the way that many of its members took photographs of each other. Kristof Titeca's *Rebel Lives: Photographs from Inside the Lord's Resistance Army* (2019) presented a fascinating juxtaposition of photographs taken by people when they were living with the LRA with recent photographs of the same places or same people. This was combined with commentaries by those involved. Without setting aside violent acts that some of those in the photographs witnessed or perpetrated, the book captured aspects of the humanity of these people in a way that goes beyond written descriptions.

Literature on recent LRA activities in Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic is sparse. The article by Titeca and Costeur, "An LRA for Everyone: How Different Actors Frame the Lord's Resistance Army" (2015), reviews available information, and the book by Cakai, *When the Walking Defeats You: One Man's Journey as Joseph Kony's Bodyguard* (2016), provides a well-informed and engaging, semi-fictional account of an LRA recruit after the peace negotiations failed in 2008. There are in addition various reports available on the internet produced by, for example, Human Right Watch and the Enough Project (examples are listed in the following section).

Primary Sources & Digital Materials

Key primary sources on the LRA are the records of the International Criminal Court relating to the prosecution of Dominic Ongwen, investigations into the alleged crimes of LRA commanders, and discussions of matters such as restitution for victims. The ICC portal can be found here: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/uganda> <<https://www.icc-cpi.int/uganda>>.

Another useful source is the Crisis Tracker (<https://crisistracker.org> <<https://crisistracker.org/>>). This was set up by activist organizations, Invisible Children and Resolve, to present a geospatial database, tracking incidents of violence in areas of Central Africa affected by the LRA. Some incidents recorded cannot be definitely attributed to the LRA; some sources of information are not necessarily robust; and the site has been linked to lobbying in the US interventions. Nevertheless, the resource has attempted to provide up to date information on LRA activities since 2011.

A wide range of other agencies have a wealth of online information. Several of these agencies provide regular updates and sometimes details of events that are not reported elsewhere. Here are a few examples:

Human Right Watch <<https://www.hrw.org/topic/international-justice/joseph-kony-lra>>

Invisible Children <<https://invisiblechildren.com/challenge/history/>>

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs <<https://www.unocha.org/fr/story/car-more-21000-displaced-lra-violence-new-ocha-map-reveals>>

Human Right Watch <<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/06/19/ten-questions-about-drawdown-us-counter-lra-operation>>

The Enough Project <https://enoughproject.org/files/LRA_Congo.pdf>

There are also many doctoral dissertations available online, including dissertations that have been subsequently published as books (e.g., Porter and Dolan), as well as a detailed study of the Juba peace negotiations with the LRA between 2006 and 2008 by Mareike Schomerus, and a thorough analysis of efforts to deal with the LRA conflict by using forms of transitional justice by Anna Macdonald:

Mareike Schomerus. "Even Eating You Can Bite Your Tongue: Dynamics and Challenges of the Juba Peace Talks with the Lord's Resistance Army <http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/734/>." PhD diss., The London School of Economics and Political Science, 2012.

Anna Macdonald. "Justice in Transition? Transitional Justice and Its Discontents in Uganda https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/files/61678040/2016_Macdonald_Anna_1041955_thesis.pdf." PhD diss., King's College, London, 2014.

In addition, several interesting and influential reports and articles are available online. These include the following:

Robert Gersony, *The Anguish of Northern Uganda* <https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/anguish-northern-uganda-introduction> (1997).

Submitted to United States Embassy, Kampala, USAID Mission, Kampala, August 1997.

This is a general overview of the situation at a time when it was generally neglected.

Tim Allen, *War and Justice in Northern Uganda: An Assessment Of The International Criminal Court's Intervention: An Independent Report* <https://www.gov.uk/research-for-development-outputs/war-and-justice-in-northern-uganda-an-assessment-of-the-international-criminal-court-s-intervention> (Crisis States Programme, 2005).

This is an early discussion of the International Criminal Court's involvement in northern Uganda; it provides a critique of efforts by many activists to promote traditional justice in the Acholi region of Uganda.

Tim Allen and Mareike Schomerus, *A Hard Homecoming: Lessons Learned from the Reception Center Process in Northern Uganda: An Independent Study* http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/28888/1/_lse.ac.uk_storage_LIBRARY_Secondary_libfile_shared_repository_Content_Schomerus_%20M_Hard%20homecoming_Schomerus_Hard%20homecoming_2014.pdf (United States Agency for International Development / United Nations Children's Fund, Washington, USA, 2006).

This a detailed study of the return of people from the LRA at a time when the war was ongoing.

Phuong Pham, Patrick Vinck, and Eric Stover, *Abducted: The Lord's Resistance Army and Forced Conscription in Northern Uganda* (Berkeley-Tulane Initiative on Vulnerable Populations, 2007).

Phuong Pham, Patrick Vinck, Eric Stover, Mareike Wierda, A.R. Moss, and Richard Bailey, *When the War Ends: A Population-Based Survey on Attitudes about Peace, Justice, and Social Reconstruction in Northern Uganda* <https://hhi.harvard.edu/publications/when-war-ends-population-based-survey-attitudes-about-peace> (Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley, 2007).

These two reports present information from surveys carried out in northern Uganda during the peace negotiations in Juba.

Uganda: Survey of War Affected Youth <https://chrisblattman.com/projects/sway/> (2006).

This portal provides access to an influential survey of war-affected youth carried out at the same time as the Berkeley studies mentioned previously. Some of the findings have been questioned by other scholars.

Olara A. Otunnu <https://foreignpolicy.com/author/olara-a-otunnu/>, "The Secret Genocide <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/19/the-secret-genocide/>," *Foreign Policy*, October 2009.

Olara Otunna was a senior figure in the government that was overthrown by Yoweri Museveni's forces in 1986. He went on to a senior role in the UN. He wrote this controversial and hard-hitting piece on what he viewed as a genocide in northern Uganda, being perpetrated by the Ugandan government, after retiring from the UN.

Phil Lancaster, Guillaume Lacaille, and Ledio Cakaj, "Diagnostic study of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) <https://www.c-r.org/resource/diagnostic-study-lords-resistance-army-lra/>," *Conciliation Resources*, June 2011.

This is a good overview of the situation in 2011, using the best available data available at the time.

Adriana Carranca, "Absolution: A Former Child Soldier in the Lord's Resistance Army Tells His Story <https://granta.com/contributor/adriana-carranca/>," *Granta*, 2020.

This is a moving account of the return home of an LRA combatant.

Films and Video

The high profile of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in the United States and Europe from time of the ICC referral was increased and sustained by numerous films and videos, several of which are available online. They include productions that mix fact and fiction for dramatic purpose. The following is a selection.

Invisible Children: Rough Cut <https://www.cinemapolitica.org/film/invisible-children-rough-cut/> (2004)

This was the first Invisible Children video. It focused on children taking refuge in Gulu at night to avoid capture by the LRA.

Lost Children <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0451101/> (2005)

A German-made documentary that focused on the difficulties facing children who returned from the LRA.

Casino Royale <https://www.mgm.com/movies/casino-royale-2006/> (2006)

This James Bond film included a fictional LRA villain <https://www.mi6-hq.com/news/index.php?itemid=4504>.

Interview with Joseph Kony <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=scMHLWzGOd0> (2006)

This video was shown by the BBC. It misleadingly edited parts of the conversation between Marieke Schomerus and Joseph Kony in 2006 to make it seem as though the interview itself and the efforts to secure it were all the work of the male narrator (who was the BBC cameraman), but it is still interesting to see Kony speaking.

Uganda Rising <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1020845/> (2007)

This is a disturbing and serious documentary film that sets the LRA conflict in a wider context.

War Dance <https://www.shineglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/WarDance_ShineGlobal_DiscussionGuide_IGNITE.pdf> (2007)

This is a moving documentary, which was nominated for an Academy Award and received two Emmy Awards. It focused on three children from war-affected northern Uganda as their school prepared to perform in a national music competition.

Machine Gun Preacher <<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1586752/>> (2011)

This fictional film was loosely based on the real story of a former drug dealer who set up an orphanage in South Sudan and occasionally engaged in combat with the LRA.

Kony 2012 <<https://invisiblechildren.com/kony-2012/>> (2012)

This was the Invisible Children video that caused a global sensation. It was essentially an advocacy film, rather than a documentary. Among the misleading aspects was that fact that the LRA was not operating in Uganda at the time it was made.

A Brilliant Genocide <<https://abrilliantgenocide.com/>> (2016)

This documentary argued that President Museveni's policies in northern Uganda, ostensibly to counter the LRA, constituted a genocide perpetrated against the Acholi people.

Devil's Chest <<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt12560552/>> (2017)

This Ugandan film tells the fictional story of a woman who is abducted by the LRA after her husband is killed. She is forced to become a wife of Kony and fights for her freedom.

Kony: Order from Above <<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7377394/>> (2017)

This feature film, made in Uganda, tells a fictional love story, set in the context of the LRA insurgency.

Wrong Elements <<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4466384/>> (2017)

This documentary, directed by novelist Jonathan Little, explored aspect of the lives of former LRA combatants. The film contains a section showing Dominic Ongwen soon after his capture.

Further Reading

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Allen, Tim. "Understanding Alice: Uganda's Holy Spirit Movement in Context." *Africa* 61, no. 3 (1991): 370–399.

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Notes

1. Tim Allen, "The International Criminal Court and the Invention of Traditional Justice in Northern Uganda," *Politique Africaine* 107 (2007): 147–166.
2. Tim Allen, "Understanding Alice: Uganda's Holy Spirit Movement in Context," *Africa* 61, no. 3 (1991): 370–399; and see the relevant entry in this encyclopedia by Heike Behrend.
3. Tim Allen, *Trial Justice: The International Criminal Court and the Lord's Resistance Army* (London: Zed Books, 2006).

4. Chapter 3 of Sverker Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings: War, History, and Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda* (2008).
5. Kony's statements quoted here are all from a filmed interview with Schomerus in 2006 in Garamba, DRC. The whole text is presented in Mareike Schomerus, "A Terrorist Is Not a Person Like Me": An interview with Joseph Kony, in *The LRA: Myth and Reality*, ed. Tim Allen and K. Vlassenroot (2010).
6. Robert Gersony, *The Anguish of Northern Uganda: Results of a Field-Based Assessment of the Civil Conflicts in Northern Uganda* (1997), 35.
7. Some of these accounts are no more than guesses. Others combine LRA combatants with those performing other roles. For example, an Amnesty International Report from 1997 states that: "Up to 8,000 children have been abducted and forced through the most brutal methods imaginable to become child soldiers and virtual slaves in northern Uganda." AI INDEX: AFR 59/02/97.
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11. "War in Northern Uganda World's Worst Forgotten Crisis <<http://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/war-northern-uganda%20-worlds-worst-forgotten-crisis-un>>." Agence France-Presse, November 11, 2003.
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15. These UNICEF were based on reports of abductions by local councils, up to 2001. After 2001, the reporting system broke down, and the post-2002 figure is only an estimate.
16. P. Pham et al., *Abducted: The Lord's Resistance Army and Forced Conscription in Northern Uganda* (Berkeley, CA, and Tulane: Human Rights Center, 2007); and Chris Blattman and Jeannie Annan, "On the Nature and Causes of LRA Abduction: What the Abductees Say," in *The LRA: Myth and Reality*, ed. T. Allen and K. Vlassenroot (2010).
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19. Chris Blattman and Jeannie Annan, "On the Nature and Causes of LRA Abduction," 154.
20. Tim Allen, Jackline Atingo, Dorothy Atim, James Ocitti, Charlotte Brown, Costanza Torre, Cristin A. Fergus, and Melissa Parker, "What Happened to Children Who Returned from the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda?" *Journal of Refugee Studies* 33, no. 4 (2020): 663–683.
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