UGANDA AND THE LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY: THE NEW ORDER NO ONE ORDERED

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ABSTRACT

For almost 18 years, the so-called 'Lord's Resistance Army' (LRA) has waged war on the Ugandan government and its own people, the Acholi. The robustness of the conflict indicates that the forces working against peace outstrip those working for it. Analysis of the conflict is often reduced to describing the LRA rebellion as the handiwork of a religious fanatic. However, the social disorder that the National Resistance Movement, led by current President Museveni, inherited in 1986 after the downfall of the Acholi-led Okello regime, contained the root causes for continued insurgency. These were amplified by external circumstances that created the operational leeway for rebellion, gathering force in the absence of a credible Acholi political leadership. A deliverance couched in religious discourse resolved the quandary. The emergence and transformation of the LRA can be made comprehensible only in relation, or even in opposition, to the emergence and downfall of the Holy Spirit Mobile Forces (HSMF) as a radical structure of rejection. Millenarian religious justification contextualizes violence and the use of terror as a means of immobilization and control of the population. As the character and composition of the LRA evolved to include the kidnapping of children, and as the terror escalated, the insurgency became increasingly ensnared in a web of internal contradictions. The result is that the LRA has exacerbated the process of dehumanization the HSMF first set out to counter.

Either they have done it, or it is being done to them – Kacoke Madit[1]

THE CONFLICT IN NORTHERN UGANDA IS COMPLETING its eighteenth year. It pitches a rebel group, the so-called Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), against the Ugandan government and against its own people, the Acholi. The parties to the conflict have demonstrated a brazen disregard for human rights and international humanitarian law. The mutilation and summary execution of non-combatants, the abduction of children and adults for use

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1.   Kacoke Madit ('big meeting') was a group formed in 1996 by Acholi people living in the diaspora to raise awareness about the conflict in their home area. KM is best known for organizing a series of conferences, held in London in 1997 and 1998 and in Nairobi in 2000.

as foot soldiers, sex slaves and porters, the rounding up of civilians in camps
— 1,200,000 at the end of 2003 — have measured the cadence of this
conflict with the regularity of a metronome. Despite the blustery rhetoric
of the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF), Operation Iron Fist has
been unable to damage the LRA significantly. Instead, it has brought the
LRA rebels from their camps in southern Sudan to permanent residence
on the doorsteps of the Acholi and, more recently, the neighbouring Iteso
and Langi populations.

The realities of this conflict appear to be far away from any of the Lord's
moral dictates. The rebels' vision of an alternative society is poorly articu-
lated, to put it mildly, just as rampant atrocities undermine the credibility
of the LRA as a popular political protest. The LRA has also proved remark-
ably resistant to military defeat. As one press article puts it: 'common
wisdom used to be that the reason for the LRA's survival was Sudanese
sanctuary — but now it's hard to see what the problem is. The LRA is just
a couple of kids and a few fanatics, and they ought to be extracted pretty
easily.'[2] This opinion reflects the two fundamental ideas invariably put
forward in attempts to analyze the conflict: kids and fanatics. As with all
conflicts, however, the reality is one of a series of dilemmas.

It has been the tragedy of Ugandan politics that violence became a
solution of first rather than last resort, in which every war can be justified
since it is always embedded in a history of attack and counterattack, of
suffering and revenge. At the core of the conflict lies the failure of consec-
utive Ugandan leaders to construct and consolidate a modern state that
legitimizes and promotes collective aspirations, and to wield the magnitudes
and levels of power a modern state conveys, other than by divide-and-rule
tactics. Many Acholi claim that they have been singled out and treated by
the current dispensation as a negative force, because of their numerical
majority in the army of former President Milton Obote. A recent UN
mission 'noted with concern that UPDF statements on the LRA refer
almost exclusively to the "rebels", even where those who may have died in
clashes are very young children'.[3]

The Acholi region itself does not hold known strategic reserves of any
key resources. In the future, though, its strategic unimportance may change
as the oil wealth of southern Sudan will be unlocked, pending a peace settle-
ment between the Sudan government and the warring factions. The sudden
eastward spread of the LRA since July 2003 into the neighbouring districts
of Teso sounded distinctive alarm bells at the national level. As of now, the
political, social, and economic marginalization from mainstream develop-
ment of the three Acholi districts of Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader is patently

2.   'Terror tag shifts Uganda's war', *Christian Science Monitor*, 26 August 2002.
3.   OCHA Regional Support Office for Central and East Africa, 'Mission report Uganda
9–11 April 2003' (unpublished document), p. 6.

measurable. The Acholi region, apart from Karamoja, is the laggard of the nation in terms of any basic human development indicator. The proportion of households below the poverty line in the north when compared to the rest of Uganda is not only low, but actually increased from 1997 to 2000, in contrast to other regions.[4] Then again, the Acholi community votes overwhelmingly anti-National Resistance Movement, and hence anti-Museveni, in local, parliamentary and presidential elections. During the 1996 elections, the LRA even declared a unilateral ceasefire to allow people to campaign and vote for the opposition.

Timescale of the conflict

Describing the history of the northern conflict in meticulous detail here is impractical, in view of the large number of events over a period of 18 years. To facilitate a better understanding, it is crucial to appreciate two elements: the genesis of a now-defunct army, the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA), and the escalation that has typified the conflict since that time. Milestones in such escalation include the start of Sudanese government support for the LRA around 1991, and the beginning of wholesale kidnapping, mainly after the collapse of the peace-talks episode in 1994.

A historic appreciation reveals three aspects of the conflict very clearly. First, it makes apparent the three-pronged strategy the government has been following. What appear to be reversals of strategy often turn out subsequently to be not so much reversals, as different aspects of the same overall strategy, depending on what seems to offer the best chance of success at a particular juncture: applying substantial military pressure on the insurgents, thinning out their ranks with offers of amnesty, or reviving the political process through negotiations. Sometimes, as in the early months of 2003, all three dimensions are in force simultaneously. In between the cracks of these reversals lie as many missed opportunities for peace. Operations such as North and Iron Fist, for instance, have proved disastrous in escalating the conflict and exacerbating the humanitarian situation, yet are cited at regular intervals as the 'final blow' to the insurgency.

Second, although the parties to the conflict have basically remained unchanged since 1988, their character and composition are dynamic. After the failure of the negotiations led by Betty Bigombe in 1994, the LRA re-emerged as a proxy for the Sudanese government, which used the LRA in its fight against the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), itself openly supported by Museveni. This period, which lasted until 2002,

4.   Ministry of Finance, Planning, Economic Development, 'Post-conflict reconstruction: the case of northern Uganda'. Discussion paper, 7 April 2003, presented at the Uganda Consultative Group meeting, 14–16 May 2003.

represents a marked escalation of the conflict. The northern conflict became embedded in regional dynamics and as a result grew more lethal. In retaliation for Ugandan government support for the SPLM/A, the Sudanese government started to aid the makeover of what had been a motley group of rebels into a coherent, well-supplied military enterprise. It assured Kony's logistics, introducing more powerful and sophisticated weaponry such as landmines and rocket-propelled grenades. The LRA and its use of terror became the ultimate fifth column of the Sudanese army: a clandestine, cost-effective force used to destabilize the SPLM/A and Uganda. At the same time, the mass abduction of children to be trained and re-socialized in rear-bases in southern Sudan grew to be the trademark of the LRA.

The third aspect of the conflict is that, however much one would like to paint LRA leader Joseph Kony as evil incarnate, terror as an instrument of war is neither a Kony invention nor monopoly. What is new is not the nature of the violence, but its scale. Even the distinction between victims and perpetrators of terror is not as cast-iron as some rudimentary analysis would make it appear; some people have been involved in this conflict at various times as soldier, civilian and rebel, sometimes even as members of different rebel groups such as the Holy Spirit Mobile Forces (HSMF) and the LRA. Terror has been used throughout the conflict by all parties, including the various Acholi insurgent groups against their own people.

To explain adequately why the insurgency occurred at all, why it did not occur at an earlier time, and why it persists to this day, it is necessary to give an account of the root causes of the conflict (the deep-rooted factors that provoked attempts to alter the *status quo* by violence rather than by political means), of the situational factors involved (the factors that facilitated the waging of war), and of the format the rebellion finally adopted, often oversimplified in terms of its assumed millenarian character. This we shall do in the following sections.

Root causes

Uganda's post-colonial experiments in state-building were based on the army as an instrument of domestic politics. Domestic politics itself was increasingly a function of ethnic retaliation. This not only hardened ethnic boundaries, but created a sizeable and almost unemployable 'lumpen militariat' class, which solidified violence as a means of interaction in society.

(a) The militarization of society: At the core of Uganda's post-colonial political development lies a double dilemma. Security forces acquired lives and identities of their own, with civilian control non-existent, while competition concerning which ethnic groups would form the constituent core of the security forces drove a history of violent political change.

In theory, defence is an archetypal public good: people cannot be excluded from its enjoyment. The modern nation-state is at once the reference point for its production and its consumption: it establishes a national army, while its geographical boundaries indicate the boundaries of enjoyment of this public good. In practice, Uganda's modern history has been an example of the state using its authoritative mechanisms to identify and exclude from this enjoyment groups of people, 'internal outsiders', from within the national boundaries. This history of marginalization has been driven by the selective composition and use of the army, turning the military into a vehicle of domestic politics: 'All successive regimes in Uganda have grossly misused the military to achieve their selfish aims.'[5] In the Uganda scenario, where the state became the instrument of violent retaliation in the arena of domestic politics, the military can be either a public good or a public bane.

Three points are important to note. First, the tendency of the Ugandan army until recently to attract mainly low-skilled persons led to a sizeable 'lumpen militariat', a class of ill-trained soldiers and officers with no discernible skills and very poor discipline.[6] Of late, with regard to the current UPDF, the report of the Porter Commission is revealing in its conclusion that there is 'a deep-seated indiscipline throughout the UPDF which requires further investigation and a full review of the capability, discipline, and honesty of officers'.[7] It is important to appreciate that this problem is but the present emanation of an old sore which stems from the earliest days of the modern Ugandan state and the formation of its national army.

Second, the frequent changes of composition of the Ugandan military meant a regular rotation of this 'militariat' in and out of civilian life. Soldiers seemed to join new rebel groups on the spur of the moment and without any sense of purpose. The return of many of the former soldiers of the Uganda National Liberation Army/Front (UNLA — Obote's 'national' army) to their villages in Acholi as they retreated north after the NRA victory in 1986 was part of the trigger of the later insurgency, and forms a direct link to the current LRA. Apart from handling weapons, most of the retreating UNLA soldiers were unskilled, and were unable or unwilling to adapt to regular village life, thus forming a fertile recruitment ground for successive insurgent Acholi groups built on the remnants of the UNLA: namely, the Uganda People's Democratic Army/Movement (UPDA), the

5.   Alfred Obita, 'A case for national reconciliation, peace, democracy and economic prosperity for all Ugandans: the official presentation of the LRA/M', Kacoke Madit meeting, London, 17-19 July 1998: http://www.km-net.org/conferences/KM98/pres98.htm
6.   J. Kandeh, 'What does the "militariat" do when it rules?', *Review of African Political Economy* **23**, 69 (1996), pp. 387–404.
7.   Republic of Uganda, *Final Report of the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations into Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth in the DRC* (Porter Commission), (Kampala, November 2002), p. 23.

Holy Spirit Mobile Forces (HSMF) and, later, Kony's troops. Behrend describes how the lack of discipline and the restlessness of the returning UNLA troops turned them into 'internal strangers' in Acholi society.[8] A form of witchcraft existing in Acholi is *kiroga*, which is associated with spirit possession and is practised primarily to take revenge. On demand, a spirit medium can incite a *cen* (the vengeful spirit of a person who has died a bad death[9]) to inflict on the victim insanity, infertility, disease, or death. Many soldiers refused to submit to purification rituals by the Acholi elders, which left the *cen* unreconciled and caused villagers to fear and shun them.

Third, Idi Amin's order in 1972 for Acholi and Langi officers and enlisted men to return to barracks only to be massacred, firmly introduced competitive retaliation on an ethnic basis. Many Acholi believed that they could hear an echo of this experience when Museveni's National Resistance Army (NRA) ordered UNLA soldiers back to barracks in 1986. During the civil war then ending, UNLA soldiers had killed, tortured and robbed civilians in the Luwero Triangle, while fighting the NRA under cover of Operation Bonanza, which Obote unleashed to wreak havoc on the local Baganda population. In the situation of considerable anarchy after the capture of Kampala by the NRA, Baganda agitated violently against Acholi trapped in the south. The Acholi expected revenge. Those who fled north brought rumours of ethnic retaliation, confirming ideas of a worst-case scenario and catalyzing support for the UPDA, newly formed at that time. This particular genie has proved difficult to put back in the bottle. Even when the NRA took power in 1986, Uganda's modern history had already, for 25 years, been one of ethnic purges and reprisals. In consequence, ethnic boundaries hardened in a self-reinforcing process of increasing mutual distrust. Each group is led to formulate a worst-case analysis of the others' intentions, while demagogic leaders dominate the political space by selectively using the historical record to validate the analysis.

Driving this narrative of attack and counter-attack is an element of distrust, or more precisely a widespread feeling of betrayal. To understand the insurgencies in Acholiland, it is important to see what the nodes of the growing distrust are, and how they have found concrete expression in a selective reading of the intentions of others. Out of accounts of betrayal of the Acholi by various Ugandan governments, three episodes stand out: Amin's order in 1972 for all troops to report to barracks, and the subsequent ethnic purges; the flouting by the National Resistance Movement of the Nairobi Peace Accord of 1985 ('The Acholi paved the way for Museveni by overthrowing Obote, and Museveni paid us back by betraying us'[10]); and

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8.   Heike Behrend, *Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirits* (James Currey, Oxford, 1999).
9.   *Ibid.*, p. 26.
10.   Quoted in Els De Temmerman, *Aboke Girls: Children abducted in Northern Uganda* (Fountain Publishers, Kampala, 2001), p. 108.

the 1988 peace treaty between the NRM/A and the UPDA, which was followed by major military operations aimed at annihilating the remaining rebels.[11] The civilian population suffered extreme brutality at the hands of the NRA during this period, with crops and domestic animals being destroyed.

(b) The de-institutionalization of politics: The core of the colonial experience in Uganda is the same as elsewhere: effective foreign conquest requires establishing, maintaining and stabilizing control over the social and political order of indigenous societies, by establishing a system of active local auxiliaries. Independence found Uganda with an entrenched racial separation of economic function and privilege, keenly felt religious divisions, and a widespread resentment of preferential treatment accorded to the Baganda, in contrast to British policy towards northern Uganda. The northern region served mainly as a reservoir for cheap labour, from which Britain recruited its soldiers. Uganda's post-colonial attempts to adopt social transformative goals and to create new political structures for popular mobilization rapidly ran into the obstacles posed by this colonial legacy: tensions between a developed centre and underdeveloped north, northern dominance of the military, and full or partial federal status for a number of southern kingdoms.

The ten-point programme of the NRM clearly established a radical vision of a more democratic and representative form of governance. The Constitutional Assembly Election Act of 1993 specified that any candidate attempting to use sectarian grounds for election purposes (defining sectarianism to include political parties) would be disqualified. The activities of political parties are still proscribed under the 1995 constitution to this day.[12]

In terms of the inclusiveness of the new coalition government that he established at the beginning of his rule, Museveni did set up initially a coalition government of national unity, under the umbrella of the Movement, and a national army that included members of various former political and armed opposition groups. There were two drawbacks to this, however. First, there was an apparent dissonance in creating an army of national unity that

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11.   Kony actually wrote a letter to the NRA's Colonel Kuteesa to request the initiation of Kony-NRA talks at the same time as the on-going UPDA-NRA talks. The initiative collapsed when NRA mobile forces attacked Kony before talks could begin: see Caroline Lamwaka, *Protracted Conflict, Elusive Peace: Initiatives to end the violence in northern Uganda. The peace process in northern Uganda 1986–1990* (Accord, London, 2002).
12.   The Political Organizations Act of 2002 placed restrictions on the activities of political parties. Meanwhile, the Movement's National Executive Committee has recommended the freeing of political parties, a proposal that the government considers should be subject to a referendum, although this attitude itself appears contrary to the constitutional right of freedom of association.

involved Acholi UNLA soldiers. One commentator, discussing the integration of surrendering irregular Baganda troops into the NRA, noted that: 'some ex-UNLA soldiers who surrendered to the NRA were removed to remote detention camps in western Uganda. The courtesy that appeared to be extended to UMF and FEDEMU soldiers was not extended to the UNLA.'[13]

Furthermore, the situation was without clear and credible military and political leadership on the Acholi side, leaving a vacuum that created opportunities for people such as Alice Lakwena and Joseph Kony to flourish. Neither the UPDA nor the UPDM enjoyed widespread support from the Acholi people. Tito Okello, unable to contain threats to his authority, had been discredited as leader and had fled the country. The UPDA was based in refugee camps in Sudan, without clear co-ordination with its political wing, the UPDM which, entrenched in distant London, could not convincingly claim to represent the Acholi political voice. The UPDA consisted of a number of brigades, which were greatly expanded when former UNLA soldiers joined after the fall of Gulu and Kitgum to the NRA. Clan leaders actually appealed to the UPDA not to start a war at home.[14] Once it did re-enter Uganda, the overall commander Odong Latek had difficulties in co-ordinating and controlling his troops, which operated in quasi-independent units.

One might argue that, even had there been credible Acholi leadership, it would not have made much difference in the end. In theory, the 'big tent' Movement idea was set up to promote national unity. In practice, it neutralized or co-opted political opposition and annulled political difference, which is the very essence of politics. In such a scenario, the state no longer works on the basis of political decisions, but on the basis of 'intimidation, dissuasion, simulation, provocation, or spectacular solicitation'.[15]

(c) The north-south divide: Grievances find concrete expression in a selective reading of the intentions of the 'significant other'. In Uganda, the north-south divide evolved as a template to interpret these intentions selectively. Politics has redefined and focused Uganda's numerous differences and projected these on to a specific fault-line of social marginalization. The fact that the pattern of economic differentiation is more complex than a

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13.   Ben Ochora Latigo, 'Acholi, victims of the northern war and isolation', Kacoke Madit meeting, 4-6 April 1997, London, http://www.km-net.org/conferences/KM97/papers_htm/victims.htm; UFM/A (Uganda Freedom Movement/Army) and FEDEMU (Federal Democratic Movement of Uganda) were Buganda-based rebel groups. According to Latigo in the same statement, 'the latter had a particularly bad reputation for harbouring Kampala thugs and criminals'.
14.   *ibid.*
15.   Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on extreme phenomena* (Verso, London/New York, 1993), p. 79.

straightforward north-south antagonism does not deny its perceived exist-
ence, manifested in a range of views from suspicions that the government
lacks a firm commitment to development in the north, to the belief that the
government is actively working to under-develop the north by hitting at
essential survival strategies based on the primary production factors of
land, labour and capital. Within a subsistence economy, the use of these is
closely intertwined to serve as economic and social coping mechanisms that
affect household and community level. Disabling the use of one, such as
land, hinders the use of other factors and puts at risk the very existence of
the household and, at the aggregate level, the community.

With regard to land, the policy of the government of Uganda of assem-
bling people in so-called 'protected camps' has had a tremendous impact
on land use. Travelling through the Acholi region, one is indeed struck by
its 'emptiness'. The Gulu District Development Plan 2001 establishes that
a total of 10,301 sq. km. of arable land makes up 87.4 percent of the
district's land area. Yet less than 10 percent is cultivated each year. The
underlying fear is how land rights under a system of communal tenure can
survive and be protected against encroachment by outsiders in the face of
depopulation and a seemingly empty land. The fears expressed in Acholi
about the current Land Act indicate a deep mistrust about the intentions
of the government on the issue of land ownership.[16]

In terms of labour, the same policy of regrouping people in camps is
widely understood as a means of earmarking the northern districts as a
labour reserve for sugar cane and tea plantations. The London-based Acholi
Association, which organized the Kacoke Madit (KM) meeting of 1998,
observed that the 'policy of protected villages is converting self-sufficient
farmers into destitute aid dependants'.[17] This interpretation, of course, is
complementary to the contribution of the LRA in destroying the fabric of
society and a generation of Acholi children, by abducting them and turning
them into traumatized killers. Both LRA tactics and the government policy
response of regrouping civilians are reinforcing a trend of lowering edu-
cational standards in Acholi.

As in many other subsistence economies in Africa, capital is accumulated
in the form of cattle. The near total de-stocking in Gulu and Kitgum dis-
tricts is frequently referred to as one of the tragedies of the war. Westbrook
asserts that the cattle population in Kitgum fell from 156,667 in 1986 to
3,239 in 1998, while, in the same period, the national cattle population

16. Lucy Larubi, 'Highlights of conflict and means of livelihood research', in COPE Working
Paper 32 (ACCORD, Kampala, April 2000), p. 21.
17. Charles Laroker P'Okot, 'The causes and effects of the northern war in Uganda and the
quest for a just and speedy permanent resolution', Kacoke Madit meeting, 4–6 April 1997,
London, http://www.km-net.org/conferences/KM97/papers_htm/causes.htm

increased from 3 to 5.6 million.[18] The replacement cost of the plundered cattle herd alone is estimated at roughly US$24 million.[19] Apart from having serious economic consequences, it has destabilized the social fabric, as animal rearing has been the traditional contribution of men to household welfare. The household economic burden now falls squarely on women's shoulders, while men have resorted to heavy drinking.[20] The tremendous haemorrhage of cattle from local communities was mainly due to the suspected cattle-rustling activities of the neighbouring Karamojong tribe. Yet a point highlighted by Behrend concerns the confusion regarding the identity of the cattle thieves, insofar as there is an often-repeated accusation that NRA soldiers have disguised themselves as Karamojong cattle raiders.[21]

In view of these arguments, Acholi perceptions of marginalization evidently present a picture of differentiation in Uganda that is not necessarily complete or accurate. Vice versa, perceptions can be equally biased. Former Army Commander James Kazini has stated that: 'If anything, it is local Acholi soldiers causing the problems. It's the cultural background of the people here; they are very violent. It's genetic.'[22] Rather than debating the accuracy of various arguments, however, what matters are the insights they offer into people's perceptions and the type of latent mobilizing power they convey for an entire generation spoon-fed on them.

Situational factors

It would be wrong simply to consider the Acholi leadership vacuum at the time of the NRA takeover in 1986, in a situation of extreme upheaval, as an extraordinary coincidence. Embedded in the leadership crisis was a deeper-rooted generation gap. Acholi political and military leaders showed themselves to be incapable of protecting Acholi interests, and demonstrated little imagination in dealing with the crisis. Traditional leaders were unable to appease and exorcise the *cen* and exterminate the witchcraft that plagued the land on the return of the former UNLA soldiers after Okello's fall, with

18.   D. Westbrook, 'The torment of Northern Uganda: a legacy of missed opportunities', *The Online Journal of Peace and Conflict Resolution*, Issue 3.2 (June 2000), http://www.trinstitute. org/ojpcr/3_2westbrook.htm
19.   Robert Gersony, *The Anguish of Northern Uganda* (USAID, Kampala, August 1997), p. 27, http://www.usaid.gov/regions/afr/conflictweb/reports/gersony/gersony_uganda.pdf, who gives a slightly higher estimate.
20.   ISIS-WICCE (ISIS Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange), *Women's Experiences of Armed Conflict in Uganda Gulu District 1986–1999* (Kampala, July 2001), p. 38.
21.   See, for example, Chris Dolan, *'What Do You Remember?' A rough guide to the war in Northern Uganda, 1986–2000*, COPE fieldwork findings, COPE Working Paper 33 (ACCORD, London, April 2000), p. 10.
22.   Quoted in Human Rights Watch, *The Scars of Death: Children abducted by the LRA in Uganda* (New York, September 1997), p. 33.

tensions escalating between people as a result. In this vacuum, Alice Lakwena and Joseph Kony, young people in their twenties, emerged as leaders to offer a holistic solution, drawing on the Acholi cultural archive to reinvent traditions of healing and cleansing. In so doing they established a new social hierarchy that successfully mobilized the population during the late 1980s.

In addition, the combination of a number of other elements directly supported the operational capacity of insurgents in the north, such as the proximity of Sudan, a huge country with its own share of rebellion and tenuous or non-existent government control of the southern area bordering on Uganda, and easy access to arms even before the advent of direct support to the LRA by the Sudanese government. The issue of arms proliferation is obviously closely related to the quick succession of wars in Uganda and neighbouring countries, especially Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The result is that an AK 47 sells for as little as USh 25,000 (approximately $12) in the Sudanese border town of Kajo-Keji.[23]

Moreover, the rebellion could tap into the economic and political resources of a large diaspora of Acholi with a history of strained relations with the Museveni government. To gain an idea of the potential offered, the best place to look is the area of capital flight. Estimates by Collier and others indicate that by 1986 some 60 percent of private wealth in Uganda was held abroad. By 1997, the Ugandan government had turned the tide on capital flight, but an estimated 50 percent of private wealth remained abroad.[24] Finally, there was the huge stock of former UNLA soldiers, important as a catalyst of rebellion because it formed a fertile recruitment ground for rebel movements and created social turmoil.[25] These men had less to lose by joining rebel movements than their peers with a higher stake in regular economic exchange. At the same time, the economic situation in Acholi was in a tailspin. Immediate conditions were exacerbated by structural adjustment measures which the International Monetary Fund imposed in 1987, with a loan from its Structural Adjustment Facility. People claim to have lost their cash savings, for example, as a result of the currency changeover. The combination of these various elements created a downward economic spiral, which stimulated favourable conditions for future rebellion, endorsing the adage that 'in war, bad money follows good'.

23.   Larjour Consultancy, 'South Sudan case study covering a number of counties in Central and Western Equatoria', Jei, December 2002, paper presented at a Pax Christi conference on the proliferation of small arms in the DRC, Sudan and Uganda, Arua, February 2003.
24.   P. Collier, A. Hoeffler and C. Pattillo, *Flight Capital as Portfolio Choice*, Development Research Working Paper 2066 (World Bank, Washington, DC, 1999).
25.   One aspect was the opportunity for corruption created by a large number of 'ghost soldiers'. Even today, the Defence Ministry has a committee tasked with investigating the existence of ghost soldiers, and a number of high-ranking UPDF officers were officially charged before a military tribunal in January 2004.

For the Acholi, the way out of the social turmoil that enveloped them took the shape of a deliverance couched in religious discourse. The story of the emergence and transformation of the LRA can become comprehensible only if it is considered in relation, but also in opposition, to the HSMF.

Millenarian movements and the use of violence

Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Movement was the outcome of elements of missionary Christianity interacting with indigenous cosmology. This product became millenarian, with believers expecting imminent salvation from God. Although millenarian discourse and rebellion seem strange bedfellows, religion and violence are not such an odd blend. Politics as such do not disappear in such circumstances, but simply seek another outlet through an alternative discourse. Most such movements — with examples being rife in Africa's colonial history — have articulated power by using terror to illustrate the limit of the political and administrative sphere.[26] Lakwena's uprising shared a common core of beliefs with all of these: the struggle against sorcery, the purification of society, the rejection of coercive elements of (colonial) rule such as taxes, the establishment of new hierarchies that countered customary and local authorities, and so on.

At the time when the NRA took control of Uganda in 1986, the Acholi elders, unable to enforce attempts to reconstitute the moral order, interpreted social breakdown as the cause of catastrophes including civil war, AIDS, their own loss of state power, and increasing distrust between people. It was now incumbent upon a prophet to establish a new discourse and dissolve the vicious circle that had been created.[27] Alice Auma, a spirit medium in Kitgum, proclaimed that the spirit Lakwena had ordered her in August 1986 to stop healing and raise an army called the Holy Spirit Mobile Forces to wage war against the evil overtaking the land, led by a range of spirits, chief among them Lakwena. The blueprint Alice Lakwena laid out was unique. Was it a cult or a military organization? It contained elements of both, but also transcended these. Lakwena established the HSMF for the purpose of war to enable the spread of a cult that contained important emancipatory elements.[28] The Holy Spirit Movement was an attempt to reconstitute the moral order based on the formulation of an

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26.   In Uganda, millenarian movements have been active elsewhere than in the north, with equally devastating consequences, such as the Kanungu massacres of 2000.
27.   Behrend, *Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirits*, pp. 29–30.
28.   The spirit Lakwena chose a woman to lead his movement; the commanders at various levels of the HSMF, meeting minimum educational standards, were elected by the soldiers; the HSMF established a separate Women's Office and Children's Office; and a War Mobilization Committee mobilized logistics for the war effort, issuing promissory notes for each donation.

alternative theory of social tensions and power relationships, which used the idiom of religion and ritual or, as Behrend calls it, 'edification by puzzlement'. Waging war was understood as an ordeal, but nonetheless a necessary instrument in the process of cleansing or purifying: separating the just from the unjust to create a healed rather than suffering community.

In fighting a war against an external enemy (the NRA), Alice Lakwena mobilized, reintegrated and rehabilitated the 'internal enemies' of Acholi society (the impure UNLA soldiers and sorcerers). A pre-condition for being purified or 'rendered just' (*maleng*), was to accept guilt and undergo the rituals of cleansing. After undergoing a range of rituals, the Holy Spirit soldiers were considered *maleng* and invulnerable in battle. If they were wounded or died on the battlefield, it was because they were no longer pure by reason of having violated any of 20 rigorously proscribed Holy Spirit Safety Precautions which would create a new humankind.[29] Operations by the HSMF were governed by the Holy Spirit Tactics, which disregarded all military principles. While the HSMF was indeed rigidly organized in companies, platoons and sections, the spirit Lakwena was the overall Chairman of the Movement, with various spirits known as Wrong Element, Ching Po, and Franco heading the various companies. The role of Alice Auma was to mediate in the dialogue between these spirits and their Movement. Terror was also used, for example against those UPDA rebels who refused to undergo the rituals and join the HSMF, as they obstructed the realization of the vision of a new society.

The HSMF was able to cross ethnic boundaries in the north but proved unable to cross into the south of Uganda. As the Mobile Forces marched south, peasants, students, and schoolchildren joined up, whereas the forces had originally consisted mainly of former UPDA rebels. When the Holy Spirit fighters reached the Iteso area, they clashed with another militia, the Uganda People's Army (UPA). The unprovoked killing of a number of UPA leaders on the orders of Alice Lakwena broadened the hostile dynamics that already existed between the HSMF and the UPDA and Joseph Kony, a former altar boy who had initially joined the UPDA as a 'spiritual mobilizer' in the UPDA's 'black battalion' in early 1987.[30] In the end, and unlike the LRA, the Holy Spirit Movement's short lifespan may have saved it from itself and from the internal contradictions it was increasingly unable to master.

Considering the genesis and downfall of the HSMF helps in understanding the LRA as a radical structure of rejection: the extent to which it is, or has been, a movement to reconstitute the moral order and how war

29. Behrend, *Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirits*, pp. 45–8.
30. B. Nyeko and L. Okello, *Protracted Conflict, Elusive Peace: Initiatives to end the violence in Northern Uganda: profiles of the parties to the conflict* (Accord, London, 2002).

figures in this process, and how its nature and composition have changed over the years. The LRA sees its struggle against the government of Uganda as a divine cause that is being directed and guided by God through his prophet Kony, indicated by the importance of supporting rituals and the transcendent moralism justifying wholesale acts of violence (as opposed to the conventional principle of secular terrorism of using the minimum force necessary), and the ritual intensity with which these acts are committed. The result is that, through its actions, the LRA has exacerbated the process of dehumanization the HSMF set out to counter.

In the early years of their war, Kony's troops seem to have used a version of 'Holy Spirit tactics' identical to that of Lakwena. This aspect was, however, much less clearly articulated and less in the public eye than the vision of Lakwena, and therefore more ambiguous from the start. All the same, a drastic change occurred with the signing of a peace accord between the UPDA and the NRA. In 1988, the defiant UPDA commander Odong Latek, not wanting to accept this accord, joined Kony rather than opting for peace. Together they declared their intention to continue fighting in a joint letter, which marked them out as having a much more clearly Acholi nationalist project than did Alice Lakwena, whose vision was that of radically transforming society, starting with Acholi and moving beyond. This UPDA connection is important in appreciating the nature of the LRA. It demonstrates the existence of an unbroken link between the LRA and those non-purified former UNLA soldiers, the so-called 'internal strangers' (in the idiom of Alice Lakwena) in Acholi society. The HSMF and the section of the UPDA that refused to join her, standing in the way of her vision, were bitter enemies. Now they refused to be formally integrated under a peace agreement with the NRM/A. To this day, the commanders closest to Kony such as Tabuley (reportedly killed in November 2003) and Vincent Otti, are part of this UNLA/UPDA genealogy in the LRA. This is significant for two reasons: it was they who persuaded Kony to favour tested guerrilla tactics over Holy Spirit tactics; and they brought with them a military experience of using terror as an instrument of war.

Even so, it would be a mistake to dismiss out of hand the force of the rebels' beliefs. A number of elements seem clear from countless debriefings given by children who have escaped from the LRA. First, like Alice Lakwena and the HSMF, Kony does not function in his own capacity, but as *loar* or messenger of the spirits.[31] Operational orders from the spirits are passed by Kony to his military commanders. Kony introduced new and totally different spirits from those that had guided Alice Lakwena, the novelty corresponding to his claims of supremacy.

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31. H. Lubega, 'Serve God or be beheaded: an LRA rebel's story', *The East African*, 15 July 2002.

Second, it is important to recognize that in essence Kony's vision is not an orthodox Christian one, as is often argued on the basis of his alleged intention to rule society based on the biblical Ten Commandments, reminiscent of Alice's Holy Spirit Safety Precautions and her vision of maintaining the purity of society through strict adherence to these precepts. Rather, both sets of prescriptions are tailored versions of a traditional practice of the Acholi elders to draw up a catalogue of prohibitions in times of crisis, the observation of which is supposed to cure a disturbed moral order.[32] It is a system that is unorthodox, in conflict with the body of essential teachings regarding beliefs and practices to which the LRA compares itself. In addition to these formal edicts laid down by the *loar* claiming divine instruction, there are also *ad hoc* rules proclaimed by the various spirits. As with the HSMF, elaborate rituals that include spirit yards and shea butter oil fulfil an essential function in the outlook of the LRA, reflecting an awareness that 'it is rituals that create beliefs and not the other way round'.[33] In addition to intricate induction rituals, escaped abductees relate how they were instructed not to take cover and to walk into gunfire, exactly like the Holy Spirit tactics, in the belief that 'holy water' would protect them as long as they respected the spiritual, divinely ordained, commands. From this viewpoint, caring for the wounded is tantamount to complicity in not respecting the command. In a speech Kony reportedly made in a base-camp in Sudan, he threatened to destroy Lacor hospital near Gulu, because wounded people 'were cared for there, instead of dying'.[34]

Religious terrorism, as opposed to secular terrorism motivated by political gains, assumes a transcendental dimension. Religious terrorists are not fighting within the rules of society as they exist, but reject these rules.[35] They regard violence not only as a necessary expedient for the attainment of their goals, which can be religious, racial or ethnic purification, but as divinely decreed, and hence morally justified, almost as a sacramental act. What the LRA, under the absolute control of Kony, has in common with the HSMF, is that it sees itself as the righteous few, those who are at once the activists and the constituents of their movement. They are outsiders from what they see as a virtual world, and terror is a traumatic intervention of the 'real' into the 'virtual' world.

Although drawing parallels with other experiences of religious or millenarian terrorism helps us to grasp the intensity of the violence in Acholi,

32.   Behrend, *Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirits*, p. 161.
33.   B. Diken and B. Carsten, 'Zones of indistinction: security, terror, and bare life', Dept. of Sociology, Lancaster University, January 2002, http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/soc091bd.html
34.   Amnesty International, *Breaking God's Commands: The destruction of lives by the LRA* (London, September 1997), p. 6.
35.   Note how this has a bearing on the interpretation of human rights law as man-made rather than God-given.

the violence itself needs to be contextualized. One of the main characteristics of the war is that control of population, rather than territory, is a key strategic objective for both the UPDF and the LRA:[36] the government forces people to move, and the LRA tries to abduct them.

Today's government army, the UPDF, is able to immobilize the population through spatial confinement in 'protected camps' shielded by local home guards, recruited at grassroots level and trained for three months, commanded by officers from the regular army. In contrast, the LRA must immobilize the population through fear. Terror is a vehicle to project power towards the Ugandan state by creating a state of exception and immobilizing the population, on the fringes of society, effectively enough to enforce a distinction between 'law' and 'unlaw', where rules other than those set by the LRA do not hold. To be effective, terror must be more than a threat which, tragically enough, is confirmed by the daily litany of atrocities. While the desired political change remains non-specific, indiscriminate violence — terror — becomes an end in itself; it generalizes responsibility through the logic of the hostage: since anybody can be hit, anybody can be blackmailed by terrorism.

To understand better the conflicting parties' focus on population requires a brief detour via the principal-agent dilemma as espoused in economic and political theory.[37] One of the features of a modern complex society is that people (principals) have to trust others (agents) to carry out their wishes. The dilemma resides in the fact that principals cannot ensure that their best interests are served by their agents, because of asymmetric information between the two sides. The greater the divergence between the preferences of the agents and the principals, the greater is the so-called 'agency loss'.

The dilemma for the population of Acholi now is twofold. The LRA is definitely not their agent: the minimum expectation any principal would have regarding the actions of its agent is respect for the preference to stay alive. For the LRA, however, as for the HSMF before it, the population of Acholi is a potential constituency, or agent, for its preference for a renewed and purified society. The potential can only be realized by passing through the suitable rituals and adhering to the commandments. The LRA is the principal, which must contain 'agency losses' by ensuring that the Acholi population caters to its vision by means of monitoring and negative incentives. Similarly, the government of Uganda does not act as the agent of the

36.   Amnesty International, *Uganda: Breaking the Circle: Protecting human rights in the northern war zone* (London, March 1999), p. 1.
37.   See Joseph Stiglitz, 'Principal and agent', in John Eatwell, Murray Milgate, and Peter Newman (eds), *The New Palgrave: A dictionary of economics* (Macmillan, London, 1987); A. Ackere, 'The principal/agent paradigm:its relevance to various functional fields', *European Journal of Operational Research* **70** (1993), pp. 83–103; Kenneth Arrow, 'The economics of agency', in J. Pratt and R. Zeckhauser (eds), *Principals and Agents: The structure of business* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1985), pp. 37–51.

Acholi. Rather, under Uganda's 'big tent' system, the Movement is the political principal and all citizens are considered members. But the Acholi, through their voting preferences, have massively rejected the Movement, in both the presidential and the parliamentary elections of 1996 and 2001. They are indeed between two fires, as the title of a study on the human rights situation in 'protected camps' aptly suggests.[38] As the villagers, the captive agent of two principals, experience every day, falling victim to one group is no shield from attack by that group's enemies.

Although the government has never declared a state of emergency or a state of exception, save for the period when Operation North was conducted in 1991 and large areas of the north were cordoned off, 'protected camps' and terror signal that a state of exception in the Acholi districts has effectively become the rule. The exceptionalism is compounded by the reliance of both the UPDF and LRA for their monitoring of the population on self-enforcing mechanisms that exploit people's distrust for the sake of making them compliant, resulting in an anti-social network where the social space in which agreeable interaction occurs, is utterly destroyed. Such a strategy comes down to 'vesting prosecutorial powers in the public . . . the distrust hereby created unavoidably gives rise to severe excesses or injustices and spills over into all spheres of human interaction'.[39]

The type of warfare conducted by the LRA produces its own internal contradictions, separating the rebellion even more from its initial intent to produce a purified society. Presumably originally waged to set society free from evil, it uses the idioms of witchcraft to produce a situation where killing and suffering are not cleansed. On the contrary, just as in 1986, the unreconciled *cen* (bad spirits) of so many wasted lives has jeopardized the existence of every person in Acholi. 'The power of a *jok* (spirit) used for personal gain in private and for destruction constitutes witchcraft.'[40] Kony uses his spirits for vengeance and killing, and so turns into the thing he is fighting, an *ajwaka*, the most feared of witch doctors. These contradictions are sucked into a negative spiral, powered by the built-in propensity for incremental violence. Both the public and the media have become de-sensitized to the unending stream of terrorist violence, and therefore ever higher levels of lethality are needed. The lethality is itself built on a recipe that blends children, stolen from their families, and a surplus of light weapons sucked in from wider regional conflicts.

38.   Human Rights Focus (HURIFO), *Between Two Fires: The human rights situation in protected camps in Gulu District* (Gulu, 2002).
39.   J.-P. Platteau, 'Behind the market stage where real societies exist — Part II: the role of moral norms', *Journal of Development Studies* **30**, 3 (1994), pp. 753–817.
40.   Heike Behrend, 'Is Alice Lakwena a witch?', in Holger Bernt Hanson and Michael Twaddle (eds), *Changing Uganda* (James Currey, London, 1991), p. 173.

Why does the war continue?

There are three possible groups of answers to this question, all containing a sediment of truth. Either the LRA is strong, because it is supported by the local population and/or supported from the outside. Or the UPDF is weak, because of internal failings and/or competing demands placed upon it. Or the war in the north is a façade for other goings-on, such as a wish to support the SPLA at a political level, and/or doing well out of war at the level of individual Ugandan army officers and commanders, just as the war provides opportunities for politicians to posture in the role of peacemakers. We shall examine each of these three clusters of explanations in turn.

Support for the LRA can be understood at the level of the Acholi population, whether local or exiled, as well as support embedded in wider political machinations. With regard to the local population, the record is extremely ambiguous. There are reports that 'some villagers, especially in Kitgum and Pader, do follow the bandits into their hideouts and donate goats and fowl. Some even chat up the commanders and share meals.'[41] In discussion, government representatives in the north especially are wont to claim that there is an active level of support for or collaboration with the LRA, distinct from local support grounded in fear. This is indistinguishable from saying that the LRA is acting as the agent of at least part of the Acholi constituency, its principal. Yet substantial operational collaboration of the Acholi with the LRA is not proven. It might be correct to say that the Acholi do not trust the UPDF, but on the whole it would be just as correct to say that most people are opposed to the war, and in this sense opposed to both sides in the conflict.

In terms of outside support, the LRA has traditionally been one among several militia groups allied to the Sudanese government army, such as the Equatoria Defence Forces (EDF) and the Southern Sudan Defence Forces (SSDF), both used by the Sudanese government to fight the SPLM/A. Through the Nairobi agreement of 1999, Uganda and Sudan have committed themselves to the cessation of support for hostile forces on each other's territory. A protocol between the two states supports Operation Iron Fist by allowing the UPDF to operate south of an agreed 'red line' in its pursuit of the LRA inside Sudan. Distrust between parties, though, remains formidable.

But the Sudanese connection is only one element in a complex set of regional relationships. The fact that the LRA is without a recognizable political wing has spurred various groups to try and commandeer the military strength of the LRA for their own political agenda. Formerly, there

41.   Onapito Ekomoloit, 'Kony's weird world', *The New Vision*, 4 October 2002.

was talk about connections between another Ugandan rebel group, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), and the LRA, both allegedly supported by Sudan. The Ugandan government has consistently asserted a link between the Reform Agenda — the political group born out of the 2001 presidential campaign of Colonel Kizza Besigye — and a new and obscure rebel group called the People's Redemption Army (PRA), allegedly backed by Rwanda through its proxies in eastern Congo. Allegations about a suspected link between the Reform Agenda and the LRA did at least indicate, then, a possible embedding of the continuation or resolution of the war in Acholi in wider regional relations than has so far been assumed.

Turning to the second group of explanations, the internal problems of the UPDF are no secret. As one press article puts it, 'troop registers were greatly inflated and soldiers unprepared. Commanders were corrupt, salaries were late and low, and there was little incentive to anyone to fight. . . . Buses leaving Gulu are routinely stopped and searched in an attempt to catch the many army deserters.'[42]

For much of the duration of Operation Iron Fist, on-going since March 2002, President Museveni was encamped in Gulu and then Soroti in order to oversee the operations himself. The President, in a statement to the press, cited drunkenness, indiscipline and laxity in the army.[43] The existence of such conditions does not inspire confidence in UPDF alertness and discipline.

This is to a certain extent related to the way in which counter-insurgency is structured around the existence of uneducated and poorly trained home guards in rural army outposts where the army officers on duty are often in fact absent. There is still no law that regulates minimum requirements and promotion within the army. A frequent complaint from the President, as overall commander of the UPDF, is about donor pressure to curtail military expenditure, leaving it with obsolete equipment of such crucial types as attack and troop transport helicopters, or even no such equipment at all. Further questions may be asked about the army's tactics.

Allegedly, the war has over time become 'a lucrative source and cover for clandestine income for high-ranking military and government officials and other profiteers'.[44] This raises the question as to whether the government and the LRA, or factions within them, have developed a vested interest in keeping the war going. Certainly, President Museveni has consistently maintained in public that the war in Acholi is about the personal enrichment of the rebel leaders, 'parasites of society', fighting for a lifestyle they

42.   'Terror tag shifts Uganda's war', *Christian Science Monitor*, 26 August 2002.
43.   'Museveni explains Kony rebel attacks', *New Vision*, 20 June 2003.
44.   Ogenga Otunnu, *Protracted Conflict, Elusive Peace: Initiatives to end the violence in northern Uganda: causes and dynamics of the war in Acholiland* (Accord, London, 2002).

could not afford through 'legal toil'.[45] Yet suspicions of vested interests are not related to one side of the conflict only. As in other, comparable, situations, some people within the army are said to profit directly or indirectly from the conflict. Examples sometimes cited include the theft of all cattle from Acholi in the period 1987–8, at an estimated value of $24 million, in which the NRA was at least passively involved in so far as it failed to prevent it. Other classic examples are more mundane forms of corruption, such as padding army pay-rolls with 'ghost' soldiers, of whom there were more than 10,000 according to an army audit in 1997, or trafficking in army fuel, to which a green colorant has been added to prevent its sale to civilians.[46] In 1997, the President criticized the monthly disappearance of USh400 million of funds earmarked for financing the government war effort in the north.[47]

In view of the material considerations surrounding the prolongation of the war, concerns arise as to whether the support of the donor community may not itself become a prize in the conflict.

Is no loaf better than half a loaf?[48]

There can be no doubt that the LRA is in total breach of human rights. The use of the community's own children and the lack of an explicit agenda legitimizing the use of violence epitomize an extreme depoliticization, in which victims are even deprived of the possibility of ascribing responsibility for, or understanding of, the anguish they suffer. At the same time, the conflict offers us a strident vision of the state in extreme circumstances. The robustness of the conflict as a semi-permanent feature of the Ugandan state of affairs for the last 18 years indicates that the forces working against peace appear to be stronger than those working for it.

In light of this the way forward is unambiguous, and has been repeated ad infinitum. The best anti-terrorism strategy is an expansive approach of democratic, social and political change by non-violent means, complemented by an equally expansive approach to augment the opportunity costs of rebellion by increasing the endowment of economic and human capital.

An important and commendable aspect over the years has been the effort to create a common space through dialogue, in order to reduce the levels

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45. See, for example, the State of the Nation address to Parliament in June 2003, published in *New Vision*, 6 June 2003.
46. S. Perrot, 'Entrepreneurs de l'insécurité : la face cachée de l'armée ougandaise', *Politique Africaine* 75 (October 1999), p. 55. A court martial was set up in early 2004 to try senior army officers accused of defrauding the military by creating 'ghost soldiers'.
47. See *New African*, October 1997.
48. This refers to a question tabled in the 1998 Kacoke Madit meeting about peace or continuing conflict.

of violence sufficiently for normal means of social and political conflict resolution to come into play. In these attempts to create an environment where the LRA rebels can lay down their arms, through the strengthening of social institutions and mechanisms for conflict resolution, civil society institutions have been a testimony to the ability and willingness of local people to contribute to peace. Their efforts serve as a model of collaborative problem-solving at the local level, especially as some of these initiatives constitute an important departure from the legacy of religious polarization and partisanship, as demonstrated by the Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative. Single-handedly, these organizations have made the case of the abducted children in Uganda a *cause célèbre* in the children's rights movement and in campaigns against child soldiers. However, many of the strategies being advocated are still new and untested, and sometimes there seems to be no clear distinction between the objectives of humanitarian, development, human rights, and conflict resolution agencies. In addition, as Bradbury puts it, 'the simplicity of much analysis neglects the wider forces at play'.[49] This is especially the case where the dynamics of the LRA and the mix of military and political strategies of the government are concerned. There is a need to look beyond the problems of Acholi social institutions and the psycho-sociological behaviour of the Acholi, and to recognize the politics of the situation at the national and regional levels.

In attempting to create local institutional mechanisms for dialogue in such a way as to make the conflict more amenable to a negotiated settlement, a number of dilemmas stand out. These include the difficulties of working for a peace settlement, the key to which may lie with parties beyond the reach of local actors, and of developing a common language to bridge the very different worldviews of the parties to the conflict. One of the main attempts to overcome this dilemma, and to develop a system of interlocutors between the rebels, the government and the local population, has been the resurrection of traditional leaders, in essence the re-creation of the system of clan leaders (*rwodi*). There are definitely questions to be asked about the effectiveness of re-inventing traditional leadership structures of male elders in a context of war and displacement and profound cultural change, with a generation of youngsters brought up in conditions that are far removed from those that enabled the functioning of such leadership structures. This seems to emphasize the generational aspect that is inherent in the conflict, where elders have been seen to be ineffective or worse and to have abandoned their responsibilities at the very start of the conflict. As traditional structures interact with a new generation of political leaders from Acholi, in parliament and in local councils, an important question

49.   M. Bradbury, 'An overview of initiatives for peace in Acholi, northern Uganda', in 'Reflecting on Peace Practice Project, The Collaborative for Development Action, October 1999', unpublished paper, p. 32.

concerns the extent to which these structures will enable political leaders to fill the long-standing leadership vacuum through political competition.

Whatever admiration or criticism one may reserve for civil society initiatives to help bring an end to the conflict, the government of Uganda remains a key player. How to dispel the distrust its actions and statements generate is perhaps the main question in establishing a climate conducive to a peace settlement. A number of factors do not seem particularly conducive to establishing a climate of growing trust. First, the government continues to maintain an artificial distinction between 'rebels killed' on the battlefield by the UPDF and 'children rescued' from the LRA, although both categories effectively cover the same group of abducted children pressed into battle by the LRA. Second, it is exceedingly difficult to obtain trustworthy information on the progress of military campaigns, and independent verification by the press has hardly been encouraged. Maintaining the 'state of exception' — that is, the absence of procedures of arrest that guarantee fair treatment and put the judiciary firmly in charge, and a lack of investigation of acts of torture and ill-treatment of detainees — as is the *de facto* norm in the Acholi districts, cannot encourage a climate conducive to gradual trust-building. Ending war means creating justice.

The last point brings us directly to the main dilemma the government faces in establishing relations with the LRA, that of balancing human rights, justice, and peace. The blanket amnesty in place provides for the crimes of the LRA leadership to be overlooked, so as to incite them to commit themselves to the search for peace.[50] Yet experience elsewhere has shown that, if serious crimes are not confronted, peace and justice remain elusive. This is a point on which the current provisions under the Amnesty Act remain silent. For this reason, the amnesty is often considered as an asymmetrical instrument in the hands of the government. This seems an ominous oversight, given that civil-military relations lie at the heart of the problem of the northern conflict. An alternative approach would be to examine the record of LRA commanders and senior UPDF officers for the abuses committed via an alternative type of reconciliation process that builds sufficient consensus about justice, along the lines of the South African experience with its Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

In terms of lowering the opportunity costs of war by raising the endowment of economic and human capital, the government and the international community continue to co-operate in a number of programmes. The dilemma here is the issue of rehabilitation and development in an environment that can only absorb relief aid. Yet these are pressing issues,

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50.   Late 2003 the Government invited the International Criminal Court to investigate crimes committed by the LRA. Subsequently the chief prosecutor announced that the investigation could commence as early as June 2004. Proposed amendments to the Amnesty Act will also exclude from amnesty the 'ringleaders' of the LRA.

as they concern some of the fundamental internal dynamics sustaining the conflict. The children who are being pushed by the conflict into early marriage, prostitution, or into government auxiliary forces are an example of the need to improve the context of lack of adequate economic and educational opportunities. Recapitalizing the economy of the north is imperative as well, when considering the total loss of cattle. An agro-pastoral economy simply cannot function while the population are confined in camps. We have pointed out the critical role played by the Acholi constituency in the diaspora, and the reality that a significant amount of Uganda's wealth is still held abroad. To put the potential of the private sector into perspective, it could be argued that providers of mobile telecommunications have done more to increase dialogue among the Acholi and between the Acholi districts and the rest of Uganda than anybody else, simply by extending their services to the north.

War has never been declared in Acholi. It is not easy therefore to see the point at which it can be considered ended. One can suspect that this will not be the case as long as all the children are not returned or have not been accounted for. In broad terms, the situation is now similar to that in 1986, when the Acholi people stopped expecting help from political processes to stem their growing marginalization and the apportioning of blame, and turned to their cultural archives to produce a truly unique solution, the Holy Spirit Movement/Mobile Forces. In a sense, as in Karamoja, but with its own distinct make-up, it was a move towards community ownership of security. The traces of this solution, which long ago succumbed to its own contradictions, cross-bred with UPDA experiences and fertilized in a regional setting of cross-border antagonisms, have brought the situation full circle. The need is for an anti-terrorism drive of the highest order, and an expansive approach of democratic, social and political change by non-violent means. Yet there are fears that the government will stick to a counter-terrorism strategy. There is the familiar danger, under the all-encompassing banner of 'security', of the further militarization of the polity and a reduction of civil liberties.