'Acholi *manyen* made us fight': Understanding the metaphor in the former Lord's Resistance Army female fighters' battle spaces

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Abstract · Drawing on from literature on women's agency in wars and case studying the various battle spaces occupied by the former Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) female fighters, I seek to argue that the former LRA female fighters' role in the war was unthinkable without the non-utilitarian *attitudinal-psycho* value motivation construct of *Acholi manyen (New Acholi).* Therefore, the repertoire of violence participated in by the former LRA female fighters, was constructed around the *Acholi manyen*, making it pervasive in the LRA war discourse and system. In a sense, I try to validate the point that the stage of *the political* in the LRA rebellion was majorly the reconstruction of *Acholi manyen* through re-Acholicisation. This reconfiguration and imagining, was to reconstitute the political, economic and social landscape of Acholi. A transition from the 'outside' - the bush (a metaphor for old Acholi, Acholi B) that was ambiguously inhabited, to the 'inside' - a restructured and re-spatialised continuum. A new 'Jerusalem' (as *Acholi manyen* was alternatively referred), as *placeholder of the normal* (Prugl, 2003). Second, by typifying the former LRA female fighter status, I connect to the broader literature on female fighter status (Coulter, 2008) and literature on the motivation of the female fighters.

Keywords · LRA female fighters · Acholi *manyen* · Battle spaces

Introduction

Whereas most war studies still essentialise women as victims of war, there is also a growing literature on women involvement in what Henshaw calls "non-state armed groups" (2017:2). Even then, women involvement is still viewed in many quarters as an aberration, both in academia and popular discourse. Most times, narratives on 'violent' women, reconstruct a 'monster' or 'whore' picture about them while some literature portray women involvement within a continuum of 'unreason' and 'mythology' (Kirby, 2012:2). This mode of thinking and attributes, implicitly structure an invisibility or non-agency picture of women in a wartime or war system. Building on the literature on the visibility and agency of women in a war and war system (Coulter, Persson, and Utas (2008); White (2006); Neil (2006); McKay and Mazurana

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(2004)), I examine the former Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) female fighters in northern Uganda to validate women's visibility and agency in a war episode and the various battle spaces occupied.

I draw inspiration from Henshaw's curiosity, "what is the motivation for women to engage in an armed rebellion?" (2017:3). Looking carefully at the available literature, one finds a big repository on the motivation of male rebel fighters and very little on the motivation of women to engage in a war. There has been an attempt to reconstruct the logic of war and violence episodes from broader utilitarian motivations in view of the dominant literature that constructs wars and violence not as the only logic, but that there are utilitarian motivations informing and giving character to the war system. In its varying degrees, the near impulse explanations range from power, resources to governance issues. These dominate both the analysis and articulations. The proposition is that, most of our actions are or ought to carry a utilitarian character and that our character springs from some 'exaggeration' of self-interest. More so, the mainstream tendency to understand male participation in war, ranges from the classical scholarship of grievance, namely, tendencies of a political, economic, religious and ethnic deprivations, with the consequences being to frustrations, radicalisation and rebellion. Closely related to that is the greed thesis picked largely from Collier and Hoeffler (2002; 2004) and Keen (2000). In the absence of dominant 'explainable' instrumental or utilitarian rationality, such a war is reconstituted as 'senseless'. It becomes senseless because it is outside our category of explanation, thought, and outside our particular understanding. It is in this purview that the LRA war has for long been categorised as 'senseless'.

However, as Turshen and Twagiramariya (1998) and Ojiambo (2002) have suggested, I argue that most times female fighters are not motivated by this mainstream thinking but rather, more bent towards basic human security that is qualified as better homes/family, better ethnic group and a whole host of other emotional attributes related to better community in a non-utilitarian sense. Focusing on the attitudinal-psycho value of *Acholi Manyen* amongst the LRA as a non-utilitarian motivation, I challenge the dominance of 'senseless' debate on the LRA war. Picking on from the version of Schmitt (2007) and Arendt (2006) the *political*, I offer a counter-proposition that motivations and rationality are not simply limited to a utilitarian value but more importantly in the case of the former LRA female fighters, on the non-utilitarian *attitudinal-psycho* value motivation construct of *Acholi manyen*.

Accordingly, drawing on this notion of human security or emotional attributes of a better community (in a non-utilitarian sense), I case study the attitudinal-psycho value motivation of the former LRA female fighters. To do this, I articulate the *Acholi Manyen* as opposed to *Acholi Macon (Old Acholi)* as the *attitudinal- psycho value* motivation and grounding, to understand the former LRA female fighters. This aspect, as I will argue, is rationalised within *the political* purview and the broad picture of attitudinal-psycho value of *enemy-friend* construction and *reflective articulations*.

Methodology

As a study strategy to reconstitute the thesis and argument, I purposefully spoke to thirty (30) former LRA female fighters. I also spoke to twelve (12) former LRA male fighters to reflect, internalise and elaborate on the episodes of the former LRA female fighters. What is interesting about this group is that I only managed to get those who were free to talk, having gone through the amnesty process. Those who did not undergo the amnesty process were not ready to talk and most of them reminisced, "I don't want problems". This is largely playing out because of mistrust and fear of entrapment on one hand and on the other, through the stories, one would probably fear government 'ears' that would report one as a 'bad element' with a 'revisionist' tendency. I also managed to speak to twelve (12) Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces (UPDF). It should be noted that I had a few respondents of UPDF officers because they were not official spokespersons of UPDF; by stipulation of the UPDF code of conduct, speaking to members of the public is restricted. Therefore, many were hesitant and for those who spoke, they did so on an understanding that they were expressing their personal views and not those of UPDF.

To ascertain the depth of analysis and articulation and in view of the fighter status phenomenon of the former LRA female fighters, I chose not to case study a particular geographical location of Acholi sub-regional but the global view of Acholi. This, I abstracted from the common tendencies as elaborated in the stories, narratives and memories of the interlocutors - the former LRA female fighters. I conducted specific interviews with members of the UPDF, to provide a pattern of the phenomenon within the continuum of the battle spaces. Accordingly, I employed a qualitative design and took time to establish the descriptive, experiential, historical and analytic focus on the phenomenon. I also employed critical observation that tended to lean more on anthropological details.

In addition, the interviews and observations were not spatial or bounded in a specific geographical location since the focus was on the female fighters, wherever they were. This explains the small size of the raw data from the field and rather, more secondary data and personal critical reflection. To offset this dilemma, I employed more of the anthropological tool of observation and listening to details. I observed and listened to the former LRA female fighters, their former LRA male counter-parts and the UPDF.

In the section that follows, I validate the fighter status of the LRA female fighters by elaborating the different battle spaces occupied and the trained fighter bodies as a rite of passage into the fighter status. Through witnessing and experiences of the former LRA female fighters, I question the dominant literature on agency and victim-prone categorisations of female folk, which is often represented as mutually exclusive. Registering similar critique by Baines (2014), Porter (2017), Coulter (2008) and Katrine (2012), I seek to argue that this duality, this state of appropriation, in which a female is perpetually seen as a 'victim' and whose agentic possibilities are ruptured, is

misconstrued. Consequently, I establish the battle spaces that the female fighters occupied, the active frontline fighting and the roles in other forms of the LRA war system.

The battle spaces

> You are used to having sex with us in Kasubi [a suburb in Gulu municipality]. Today, I am commanding a war on you!" LRA Captain Achiro[2]

Captain Achiro, as popularly known within the LRA fighter group, orchestrates a fighting moment when she commanded an ambush in Palabek against UPDF, a battle that is considered by the UPDF soldiers interviewed as "vociferous and tough". Hurling insults and invoking a resistant sexual proposition, Captain Achiro cried aloud, "you are used to having sex with us in Kasubi [a suburb in Gulu municipality]. Today, I am commanding a war on you!". 'This was a serious ambush', retorted the UPDF soldier. "This same Achiro again ambushed us in Pajule. But what we realised later was that, this Achiro had earlier on married a UPDF soldier to gain access to our security details". Another UPDF respondent recounted how they were ambushed around Juba Bridge in Aswa ranch, Pader district. The UPDF were on a patrol to Atanga (a sub-county in Pader district) when they entered an ambush of about seven LRA soldiers. Recounting the fight, a UPDF soldier detailed how they were fought and how they managed to capture three of the LRA fighters and one was a woman clad in a new beautiful uniform, gumboots and fully armed with an AK 47. When asked what her name was, she said that she was called Apio.

   Agnes, a private in the LRA regular members, was delighted to go through her experience and recounted with much attention and details. She remembers that her gun was an AK47 and argued that she was glad that she was at the front line fighting alongside men. She mused with confidence that she fought in many places including Palutaka, Margui, Kony village in South Sudan and very many places in Acholi, Lango and Teso. She countered,

> We were very good fighters. We would strategically allure our UPDF victims into confusion by making sharp and scary sounds and noise, including beating tins and any noisy object we would lay our hands on, and given the scare and confusion, we would be delighted to have a kill. In one of the successful encounters, we applied our usual tactic and we had for ourselves an exciting result; we overpowered them [UPDF] and burnt two of their tanks [Armoured Personnel Carriers – APCs] that they abandoned because we overwhelmed them.

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[2]All names of respondents used in this study are pseudo-names meant to protect their identity

Monica enjoyed the field or frontline; therefore, she never did domestic chores, washed or cooked. However, she had also to endure what it means to be a fighter soldier. In many cases, they had to carry their dead or wounded comrades regardless of distance, weight or decomposition. In one instance, she carried a man from Uganda - Ngom Oromo up to Palutaka in South Sudan, which is about 50 kilometres (with some breaks of sharing the load with either a male or a female colleague). In both situations, they had little rest because they had suffered losses and had a number of their colleagues either dead or badly wounded and were busy rushing them for treatment or to burry. Another UPDF soldier interviewed, recounted his experience on their attack on "New Kampala" in 1997, the LRA Headquarters in South Sudan and how the females who were killed died with guns in their hands while those captured alive were armed too. Reinforcing this encounter, an LRA female fighter spoken to had this to say, "the operation caught us by surprise and it is as though one of us in the LRA army betrayed our security. I had no options but to hide in the underground a tunnel since we were virtually overpowered. As I hid, I was seeing death coming because I had nobody to cover me up if fire were to be exchanged. I cursed this traitor!"

In the sub-section that follows, we establish and clarify on the non-active combat level, as another battle space that the former LRA female fighters engaged in. By detailing the non-active combat line, this section also doubles in pointing out actual different battle spaces that the former LRA female fighters occupied. In the episode of the former LRA, I mention the following: escorting and guarding, mourning squad, regimental units in charge of administration, and intelligence. As much as I adumbrated the earlier active combat, in this section, I try to bring forth the experiential narratives and perspectives with regard to the non-active combative battle spaces. As one will discover, the experiences and narratives seem as strong as the actual battle, giving an impression that both active and non-active combat was treated as equal in the LRA war system.

Unarmed combat (other battle spaces)

The LRA fighting system was regimental, with young girls and boys kept as escorts in the barracks to keep guard and watch over the wives of the fighter group that were out for war. One LRA female fighter said,

> I was taken by Tabule [LRA middle-range commander] to escort and protect his wives. However, the 'senior wife', I called her 'Mum' because she was treating me very well. [Interestingly, it was Tabule that led LRA group to Teso [Soroti] and killed many people and also abducted her and her elder sister-whom she learnt later that she died at the battle front].

It is important to observe that while the escort phenomenon was normalised, majority of the LRA top and middle range commanders preferred females and not males to escort and guard their families. For example, even in Kony Village, the one-time headquarter of the LRA rebel leader, women mostly guarded it. When pressed further to elaborate why this episode, one of the interviewees replied that, "to avoid men from sneaking through to Kony's many wives".

There was also the tradition that where there was an LRA establishment, it required a matron, a woman of an advanced age to counsel especially the young women. Some were assigned nurse duties, especially if one claimed knowledge in the field. Another interviewee called Ayaa, was abducted from Kalongo hospital nurse training school (St. Mary's Midwifery Training School) and while in the bush, she was promoted to the rank of a captain and she did nursing work. There was also a "mourning squad", who would mourn the death of their LRA comrades. This act of mourning, as it was clarified by most of the female fighters interviewed, was not to function as the usual ritual accompanying death and burial but rather, was instrumentalised to function as a resistant and rallying point for continued resistance against the UPDF and Museveni[3]. Therefore, it was a construct to demand revenge on the part of LRA. Similarly, the various LRA established sites also had majorly women as; Regimental Sergeant Major (RCM) over seeing the administration of discipline, welfare, training and parade needs and equipment. They were also largely in the LRA Military Police to ensure discipline and handling crimes.

Many women were also recruited into the intelligence arm of LRA because they were considered actually intelligent. One of the former male commanders when asked on this matter said, "women were our best in intelligence work. They were intelligent and intuitive", repeating what the rest of the male LRA had earlier said, as if the message was carefully choreographed. In detailing her antics, one LRA female fighter said,

> I was an informer; I would dress in civilian clothes, move around and on several occasions, I came to Gulu town. I even befriended soldiers. Sometimes, I spent a week with them in the barracks to know the positioning of what in LRA we call "undesired armoury/guns. [These were APCs, artillery and helicopters known as 'sura mbaya: bad figure'- to denote its being ugly both aesthetically and in terms of its killing capacity], UPDF locations and other security details like; attacking, surprise and withdrawal routes".

Confirming this robust involvement, a UPDF officer who was once in one of the military division barracks complained,

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[3]Yoweri Kaguta Museveni is the current President of the Republic of Uganda

> As a member of the Court Martial, we used to frequently deal with cases of weapons and bullets going to LRA through the LRA women. For example, an LRA woman whom we later got to know as a logistics officer of these fighters was caught with cartons of UPDF uniforms.

In the subsequent section, I build on the argument of Ayotte and Husain that fighter position and fighter bodies of the female fighters even when historically has not been well represented, there is need to "step inside their unique experience" (2005:4). I briefly look at the LRA process and representation of the fighter bodies of the female fighters. I specifically look at the training and rite of passage into the LRA war system. I articulate the notion of 'fighter bodies' as a metaphor of machine-body synthesis. Here, I elaborate how the trained fighter bodies gained the LRA female, a fighter status within the LRA war system. This is important since trained fighter bodies fulfilled the requirement to construct notions of authenticity and acceptance into the fighter status and war system.

Trained fighter bodies, recognised fighter status

Whether it was how to use a gun, kill, abduct, interrogate and torture, all the LRA female fighters interviewed chorused that women had a competitive training urge for survival. In the training episode, one of the training antics was to kill to stabilise your emotions in the face of death. More importantly, the LRA training was partly meant to construct a desexualised fighter body; trained bodies to endure pain, bodies that keep secrets, bodies identifiable with the rebel group, beyond feminine bodies. Additionally, most women were also trained as commandos, especially in Khartoum, Sudan. The involvement of women in this rather 'bizarre' form of the military tactic was not necessitated by a representation of gender but rather, a desexualised efficiency, that goes with the 'target', 'discipline' and 'accurateness' required of a commando. It is this logic that got women who were caught escaping from the training, shot dead. There were also other several trainings for various categories of command structure and like men; women were expected to show their efficiency.

LRA training camps accordingly desexualised the female body sphere and created the fighter bodies. Cross-checking the adequacy of the LRA female fighter's "trained bodies", I enlisted the witnessing and experience episode of the former LRA male commanders and UPDF soldiers (herein interviewed). The responses were that, women were very good fighters who would not withdraw easily. Asked why this is the case, what came out was how women combined trained fighter bodies with emotional attachment to their children and husbands. Then, the statement was, "women cannot lose what they have - children, their husbands" and their imaginings of a new Acholi. This is a mode of motivation we shall elaborate in the subsequent section. In situations of being caught, women would endure torture more than men would. One particular statement stood out, namely, during the process of torture, an LRA female fighter had

this to say to UPDF; "iming [stupid].Uganda is bad, Museveni wants to finish us ... We want to come and get our families out of Uganda to come and stay with us (in the bush - Kony Village)".

There were also confessions that, "women are more aggressive". When we pressed further why they are or people feel they are; the answer was, "women naturally talk a lot. But with the skills of aggression and threats acquired from the training, they employ a lot of threatening words, which make them more fearsome". In addition, the general feeling was that one should "if caught or arrested by LRA, pray not to get a female LRA commander". One of the former LRA commanders emphasised,

> Female fighters (LRA) were strong, tough and rarely had mercy. Men can have mercy, but not the female fighter or commander. Tough to be feared and respected. Also tougher on men to subdue the masculine character of men.

Similarly, women were represented as the majority in the intelligence and good in intelligence work. In the words of Achire, one of the LRA commanders,

> We had few men in the intelligence. They are not good. They simply drink, brag and disclose details to their girlfriends. However, women were the majority because they have a very quiet and deep heart to reveal anything even at the point of death.

Building on the clarification and elaboration of the female fighter status in the LRA war system, in the section that follows, I explain the non-utilitarian motivation for the female fighters. The central thesis of this section is that the involvement of female fighters in the LRA war was unthinkable without *Acholi manyen (new Acholi)*. The repertoire of war and violence participated in by the LRA female fighters was, therefore, constructed around the *Acholi manyen*, making it pervasive in the LRA war discourse and system.

Acholi manyen, war and violence

> iming [stupid]. Uganda is bad; Museveni wants to finish us.... We want to come and get our families out of Uganda to come and stay with us [in the bush - Kony Village]. A Female Fighter Resisting Capture by UPDF

The notions, *'Acholi macon'* and *'Acholi manyen'* as domains in the LRA war discourse, are co-constituted as a social, organisation, value classification, and a category of consciousness on modes of life, group organisation and the state of living. In that case, *'Acholi macon'* should not be understood in the sense of a temporal continuum of tradition to mean 'old', 'outlandish', and/or 'conservative'. Similarly, *'Acholi manyen'* should not be understood in the time presence of 'the now', 'new' or

'less traditional'. I draw from van Meijl's idea of culture as a "product of historical and social forces rather than biological" (2008:168). Similarly, the category of *'Acholi macon'* and *'Acholi manyen'*, are culture traits that are constructed and embedded in a social force or milieu. This means, they are a classification built on the following criteria: the attribute of the person, as potency or capability; and the ability to impose its will/perspectives as superior in a social action. They are also construed as control of the setting, value and process at individual and systemic levels. Fourth, is the operational level in all domains of life, influencing all situations and becoming a placeholder to motivate and influence thinking and acting. Therefore, using Foucault's notion of power (1989) as to "structure the possible field of action of others, and the sense of 'to govern', in what Wolf calls, the "16th-century sense of governance", or what Foucault calls "action upon action" (1989:586-587), we can deduce that such a culture or people are 'old' when they cannot operate normally. The positive power and operation is within the 'new' people or culture. Building on Taylor's works on 350 "peoples", "tribes", and "nations" (1889), the term 'culture' was substituted for "peoples", 'tribes" (Schnegg, 2014:55). This was affirmed by Whiting (2006). In this sense, *'Acholi macon'* and *'Acholi manyen'* are not to be seen from purely a cultural perspective but rather peoples' (Acholi) perspective.

Similarly, the notion of *'macon (old)'*, is not understood from the perspective of 'remoteness' in the Himalayan context or a 'primordial' domain but similar to the metaphor of 'glaciation' or 'freezing'. Of course, we know that 'remoteness' continues to inform anthropological thinking, even when geographical distance is no longer central to 'remoteness' (Harms and Hussain, 2014). Instead, the remote can be detached from its geography and understood, not as a spatial concept but a sociological relative association or relation (ibid). In that case, *'Acholi macon'* is not remoteness but rather understood in the LRA war system as the *'pathological'*. *'Acholi manyen'* as a design or 'movement' towards reconstructing an Acholi that is free from 'pathogens', free from diseases such as corruption and political enslavement. This transformation and reconfiguring is not towards something new, but rather 're-something', that is, re-Acholicisation in which it is assumed by LRA as a place or a kind of political order in which there is 'peace', 'dignity', 'pride' and 'prosperity' as it used to be. As a political project, it is assumed by the LRA that this will return the nostalgic original authentic identity of the Acholi.

Meanwhile, the 'bush' in the dominant LRA war narrative was not antithetic to the building of *'Acholi manyen'*. However, there is need to contextualise the notion of 'bush' in the mainstream LRA war system and the attendant construct of *'Acholi macon'* and *'Acholi manyen'* as opposed to the usage by the LRA abductees. To the LRA abductees, 'bush' did not mean a 'primitive' site or ' the wild' but a 'location', a 'habitation'. Similarly, "while in the bush", as commonly was used by the abductees, was the temporality of the abduction to this 'new' habitation of the LRA. The second and more central meaning of 'bush' was used by the LRA to reconstitute its *'Acholi manyen'* in contradistinction with *'Acholi macon', which* was seen as a 'bush'. This is

not simply a battle of perspectives, a battle about spatial centrality and marginalisation, making it in a state of a pendulum; therefore, ambiguous and precarious. Rather, in the case of 'bush' as a description of *'Acholi macon'*, it is in the estimate of the LRA, a 'wilderness', a territorial terrain that is 'pathological' and troubled with iniquities. Therefore, 'bush' carries a reconfigured meaning of "a place of pathogens", a site where the 'damned' hopelessly inhabit.

To begin with, Baines (2017) elaborates on the LRA leader, Joseph Kony's extensive 'lectures' to the newly abducted who were now in Kony's village. One of such numerous and repeated lectures was,

> Museveni [referring to President Museveni's famous metaphor when in one of his rallies, mused that the Acholi were like "grasshoppers" in a bottle biting and killing each other] is very stupid... It is the stupid Acholi who are in a bottle, but not me, Kony. The stupid Acholi are biting each other (Baines, 2017:35).

Similarly, in his extensive 'lecture' to the elders gathered in Juba at the beginning of the 2006 peace negotiations, LRA's Joseph Kony had this to say,

> For instance, in 1990 during Operation North, there were cases in which men who were captured were reportedly sodomised [tek gungu-meaning "bend over" or "kneel hard", a reference to battalions that raped men] by the NRA [National Resistance Army - now Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces, UPDF] - don't you know about tek gungu? Don't you know about our cattle, which were stolen by the NRA? Don't you know about land grabbing? If so, then how do you pretend not to know why the war by the LRA is being fought? Even now, land is being grabbed like Aswa Ranch, but what are you as elders doing? You are just there doing nothing! (Bianes, 2017:35).

From these stories, as was his habit of beginning his lectures, Kony will have drawn the attention of his hearers, the newly abducted. Building on this, and as Erin Baines elaborates, her interlocutors - the former LRA captives, were able to confirm that,

> Kony would say that his people had been 'killed', and that 'this is the beginning of the new Acholi'. The one that is home is going to be wiped away by AIDS. The one with him is Acholi A and the other one [those left behind in Acholiland] is Acholi B, that would be wiped out and that the Acholi A were the ones who are going to start *Acholi Manyen*" (ibid).

To articulate this space, I draw from Van Acker's (2004), *Acholi Manyen* is a religious discourse which needs to be read within an historical continuum that begins with the precursor rebel group, the Holy Spirit Mobile Force (HSMF) led by an Acholi

woman called Alice 'Lakwena' (*Lakwena* is a local phrase for "Messenger") whose foundation of the rebellion was three pronged: a political, moral and a spiritual crusade (Trondsen, 2017:65). Alice Lakwena believed that the Acholi were on the verge of being annihilated by the new regime of Yoweri Museveni, and that the rampant immoral acts and the spiritual impurities, in Alice's estimate, were pervasive in the daily lives of the Acholi. Three tenets that Alice Lakwena set and the attendant proscriptions of the spiritual guidelines were later picked on by Kony to re-articulate his *Acholi manyen*.

Accordingly, spiritualism and purification were reified by Kony's LRA as the master narrative of the rebellion and construction of the *Acholi Manyen*. From these spiritual claims, abductions were re-interpreted and reconfigured by both the LRA fighters and the abductees to justify the conduct, in the transition to '*Acholi manyen*' space, while deaths and other injuries were explained as a 'spiritual punishment', a sign of 'impurity' and 'violation' of one of the 20 proscribed holy spirit safety precautions (ibid.:66). In a sense, we see two major shifts characterising the *Acholi manyen*, a shift in concept from the legalistic term "impunity" to a spiritual term "impurity". This meant the construct of *Acholi manyen* was also less a legal entity in the modern definition of a state and so, *Acholi manyen* was not exactly a 'state'. The second and major shift was the de-personalisation of the punisher and tormentor from Kony or LRA to the spirits and spiritual realm.

Whereas conducted by LRA soldiers, different forms of violence were simply ordered from the 'above', from the spirits, an erstwhile shift of burdens from Kony as well, to the spirits. In other words, this gave the impression that by Kony exerting the various punishments, he had no choice but to obey the orders of the spirits too and that, he was as vulnerable as the people were he was leading. However, two issues emerge from this second shift, namely the *'Acholi manyen'* became visualised more and more by Joseph Kony himself as a spiritual project. Second, the fear factor that Kony as was famed would see through the minds and that the 'spiritual powers' he possessed always instructed him on likely 'sinners', enhanced a sense of culpability (ibid) in the minds of the victims as being justifiably victimised for one's own sin.

Acholi manyen is, therefore, an episode of flight from the 'old' that is considered, using the words of AbdouMaliq (2014), ambiguously inhabited and needed to be restructured and re-spatialised. This frame is built on the perceived problematic of *'Acholi macon'* as occupying a purview of the inverted, the perverted and the exterior, a 'bush overpopulated', not with people but with immorality, greed, unprincipled elders and Museven's traitors. The last postulate in the LRA project of *'Acholi manyen'* whose proposition was to re-establish new modes of thinking, behaving and political life that capture the imaginings of the crafters while simultaneously disrupting the exterior networks and its ambiguous habitation. As a reconstructed space, *'Acholi manyen'* is both an entity and a socio-political space, a 'place holder', a space for which fighting was motivated and unto which the fighters called home or 'a space outside war, a space to return to or at least to die trying to protect' (Prugl 2003:336).

Whereas Prugl uses this phrase in the context of showing how women are represented as 'the home, owners, or mothers of the home, I argue that in the case of LRA, *'Acholi manyen'* both in its entity and socio-political form, symbolised this place and became the *place holder*.

The placeholder in this case is a special domain that is co-extensive *with 'Acholi manyen'*, and as the nomos, its spatial continuum became expressive of this Acholi manyen, making it positioned and perpetual (Latour, 2005). Whereas it was largely symbolic and an ordinary on-goingness, with hardly any specific shape (Berlant 2012), induced a paranoid feeling of a better Acholi. Acholi A compared to the bush Acholi B was riddled with the scourge of internment in camps, HIV/AIDS, traitors - which embodiment, made the construct of Acholi A and Acholi B, intelligible. This situation (Acholi B) and the alternative repair narrative into Acholi A with its founding myths, rhetoric, flag and ten commandments as anchors of this fantasy, made the *'Acholi manyen'* discourse and construct, popular amongst the rank and file of the LRA. However, whereas the myths were originally a strong rallying point to configure somehow a political image of the '*Acholi manyen'*, it did not only remain vague but also not a constant in building support.

In this case, whereas Acholi has since time immemorial referred to a people and culture*, 'Acholi manyen'* constructs a new category and meaning of the Acholi. It is a transition space that re-roots identity from the 'out' to the 'inside', motivating a stayee attitude and a non-necessity to flee (Purdekova, 2008a:6) on the part of the inhabitants of this inside (Acholi manyen). Picking on from Berlant and Greenwald's (2012:71-72) notion of *erotophobia*, "they hate us for our virtues, and we hate them for their pleasure", one sees two issues emerging, the rationalisation of abduction from an "episode" to an "event" with both acoustic and redemptive capacity. Second, the routinised lectures and indoctrination became the LRA's most singular pedagogy in representing their estimate and clarification of the situation. These two platforms were reinforced by what Titeca (2010) affirms as a spiritual discourse acting as a medium through which other grievances can be framed. Symbolised in the Ten Commandments and the alter, the spiritual discourse and expressive continuum, it was essentially not only a discursive frame but also functioned to guide the armed struggle and authoritative incentives for compliance.

This space subsequently is reconceptualised as a "new order". These broad reductions underlie *'Acholi manyen'*, a continuum whose space contours and rules were to serve the purpose of intelligibility of the *'Acholi manyen'* construct in its literal and figurative sense, forbidding and prescribing certain forms of expression and association. The forbearance and prescription served the logic of reconfiguring and reconstituting the *'Acholi manyen'* landscape in its geo-spatial sense, while at the ontological level, and using the phrase of Purdekova (2008b:8), "re-emplacing its population / inhabitants". A sort of a primordial reconfiguration with a complex spiritual, moral and political meta-narrative that does not simply supersede the original state of affairs, but rather vetoes and replaces it. Subsequently, the section that follows

shows how this discursive notion of *'Acholi manyen'* rationalised and reconstituted the LRA war and violence.

Acholi manyen: War and violence

War and violence became a raison d'être for politically and militarily enforcing the *'Acholi manyen'* vision and construct. In addition, as I said, the earlier ambiguous habitation was reconfigured in the light of the constant lectures from LRA top commanders, which rationalised the previous experience of abductions. In the new wave of 'enlightenment', abduction was considered legitimate; therefore, it rationalised and propelled yearnings for further abductions, especially relatives, to this new habitation. In other words, one also begins to see why hostilities and violence towards the abducted, and strict rules on the procedures of handling especially female captives were ruthlessly followed (Baines, 2017).

In this sense, 'violence does not have only one logic' (Hoffman, 2004:211). Building on this, we see a need to counter-pose the rhetoric of rebellion and see other logic of motivation of the violence. This logic transcends the violence narrative and leads us to the production and reconstituting of a new political and social imagined landscape (Purdekova, 2008b:4) of *'Acholi Manyen'* articulated in certain prescribed forms. Accordingly, this concept of *'Acholi Manyen'* is a concept central to this paper and forms the thesis to our earlier question, 'what is the motivation of LRA female fighters'? In light of this, I want to say from the onset that the common narrative that LRA had 'no political agenda' is grossly misrepresented partly, because its rebellion and nature of violence was not clearly seen as directly contesting state establishment and power but instead collapsed into 'ethnic' killings. My proposition is that, if we see the LRA rebellion within the logic of the state, we see little as a political platform. Rather, we need to see from the logic of the rebellion itself, whose discursive and symbolic construct has been the re-Acholicisation and reproduction of *Acholi manyen*.

Although less studied a phenomenon, it is important in understanding the motivations of the LRA female fighters, particularly, when this reconfiguration - *'Acholi manyen'* is placed within a continuum beyond mere geographical space to a space of transformation of the Acholi ethnic identity. This clarification, as we shall see, undercuts largely orthodox responses given by the captured or surrendered female fighters when asked why they could not escape and the response normally is 'fear of the severe reprisal or consequences that normally range from extraordinary beatings to imprisonment or even death'. This needs to be put into context, especially when it was a tactic agency to live with, keep and protect the children. Otherwise, one may find it lacking and weak an explanation on the one hand, and a more politicised form of defence on the other. Otherwise, a fault line is normally drawn that, one's agency undeniably must have transcended all odds and getting one trying a 'move' to escape or contest the present situation.

It is interesting though that majority of those reported to have escaped and returned were actually children and the wounded. It is critical, however, not to discount the complexity around the 'returnee' and 'stayee'. This is so because having this discussion without reference to the actual timelines of the development of the LRA war is a bit disconcerting. In the timelines, one notices that escapes happened much earlier perhaps when most of the abductees were children and the war was generally taking place in the plains of northern Uganda and the neighbouring regions of South Sudan. However, the captures and intense fire exchanges were later happenings and mostly happened when the LRA bases in the Imatong Mountains had moved deeper into Garamba forest in Central African Republic (CAR), and during the 'Operation Lightning Thunder'[4]. By that time, most of the abducted children had grown into youths. So it appears logical that those captured would not be children unless if they were born in the bush. Otherwise, majority of the youths and adults were normally either captured or surrendered under intense fire exchange.

This creates a broad anomaly on the landscape of return and those who opted to stay or wanted to stay and were returned 'forcefully' through the contradiction of capture or surrender. It is this continuum that Purdekova (2017) classifies as 'returnees' and 'stayees', a classification I shall internalise by case studying the LRA female fighters in this new configuration, particularly, how the construct and imagining of *'Acholi Manyen'* motivated a "stayee" mode. In other words, how was the construct and the new polity, *'Acholi manyen'* conducive in the production of female fighter bodies in specific, and fighter status in general? Once in South Sudan in the Kony village, either by abduction or voluntarily, the women joined a new space, a space of 'mobilised' diaspora. This new setting is precariously situated, in view of setting a transition from 'outside' (the old Acholi) and the 'inside' (Acholi manyen), a production of displacement that was at first traumatising and meaningless, particularly considering the episode of torture and killings at the spots of abductions by the LRA. This new reality was reconfigured and soon turned to be a question beyond morality of abduction to the politics of abduction. It shifted from being saved from *'Acholi macon'* to a question of *the political*, a framing of friend-foe /enemy dichotomy.

The *political* is used here as an orientation of exercising political judgment with imaginations that go travelling and seeing things from another perspective. It is a process of interpretation, which Baines (2017) underscores while citing Kant's notion of an enlarged mentality and new meaning that come with a reconfigured new experience. Arendt (1963; 2006) dutifully confronts this issue in the trial of Adolf Eichmann[5], which made her to rhetorically pose a question about the crime and

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[4]Operation Lightning Thunder was a military offensive against the LRA that was launched in December 2008 by a combined military consisting of Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic and Sudan. This operation received intelligence and logistical support from the United States of America.
[5]Adolf Eichmann was prosecuted in Jerusalem for his roles as a Nazi German functionary who sent thousands of German Jews to their death.

responsibility of Eichmann. In order to understand the conduct of Eichmann, Arendt moves beyond *vita activa* (active life) to *vita contemplativa* (contemplative life) from which she coins the term, "banality of evil" as the *situated* problem of Adolf Eichmann. Arendt concluded that the problem Eichmann found himself in (even when guilty), was not simply the problem of being monstrous or wicked but rather, a political problem of a movement that was simply moving, a sense of *"thoughtlessness"*, simply judging and acting without a *post scriptum* (after thought), a lack of reflection.

Although Arendt (2006) does not project this challenge in a concrete way, earlier on Schmitt (1995; 2007) as the originator of the term, "the political" did so. In his masterpiece, *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt (ibid) argues that this aspect of 'thoughtlessness' happens because, *the political* is pecuniary, and that the friend-enemy opposition constitute the basic code, which alone is responsible for war and violence of any magnitude or proportion. To show this perennial link, Schmitt (ibid) shows how among others; if economics, ethnicity, culture, and food lead to war and violence, it is because they have become of *the political* by its capacity to group people as friends and enemies. It is this concept of the "friend-enemy" that I seek to reproduce the political instrumentality of *'Acholi manyen'*. In a word, I have adumbrated the process machinery for this Acholi manyen polity agenda for re-Acholicisation to be defended by fighter bodies. Meanwhile, having seen the active involvement in the LRA war system, one needs to be curious and ask whether the LRA female fighters actually understood the Acholi manyen project. In view of this question, the subsequent section, seeks to deal with this, by evaluating the internalisation of Acholi manyen by the LRA female fighters.

Internalised Acholi manyen

Whereas the performative character of the female fighters was probably not rational in one's estimate of rebelling, it was, however, thinkable. Thinkable to an extent that it was an impulse to legitimise militarily the *'Acholi manyen'* and to serve certain ends. As we said earlier, although *'Acholi manyen'* was an entity symbolised in the 'Kony Village' in South Sudan, it was more a cognitive scheme, a set of discursive frames, organisational routine and contingent assemblage, making it a political project (Brubaker, 2002). In that case, it was not definitively present although pervasive and more as a construct in the general machinery of the LRA. Amidst this ambivalence, the question is, did the female fighters internalise *'Acholi manyen'*. This is the question of this section and accordingly, we proceed to dig through data to answer this question. The objective of this section is to transcend the stories of agency in the *'Acholi manyen'* construct and be able to ascertain critically the level of conscious involvement.

It is a factual expression that the female fighting episodes were not just elaborating defence of *'Acholi manyen'* but pretty much constituting it. The abuse of UPDF as

'iming (stupid)' or 'you used to sleep with us, now I am commanding', is remote from portraying UPDF as irrational, immoral or obstructive but rather, as a constitutive act in the logic of defending *'Acholi manyen'*. From the data, what is clear is that the foundation of this conviction seems deep enough although not well internalised. Second, it seems that it was only re-lived in as long as Kony lectures were resounded and spurred their minds and hearts, making it more a political ideology. In another sense, one sees a construal that is concretised in these lectures while suppressing simultaneous experiences of violent abductions by LRA itself through processes of selective imagining.

What is more, therefore, is that *'Acholi manyen'* was pretty much embodied in Kony and Kony's regular lectures, which in a sense turned to become an indoctrination. Even then, this rhetoric, whereas it simplified the complex Acholi cosmology and political history, it also simplified the level of consciousness about the Acholi among the female fighters. Like any other fighters, they were mobilised into this project and expected to exhibit a heroic nature required of a fighter body they had newly acquired. This brings to question the capacity of internalising the project. The female fighters turned to become emotional instead in the war system; obedient and executing their tasks in a routinised way that turned them as fighters constituted as what Arendt (1963; 2006) would call, 'a movement that is simply moving (thoughtlessness)' that was simply unfolding without much thought put into it.

We can see occasional signs to denote some amount of reference to the *'Acholi manyen'*, for example, an LRA female fighter respondent argued, "I went to abduct people in my village because I wanted to keep them safe from Museveni's agenda ... I was later blamed by my relatives and yet I was helping them". However, this was performed more as a moral crusade and less as a reflective act of a well-internalised mode. Subsequently, we can see about three modes of framing towards Acholi manyen, which are far from being internalised, but are rather more rooted in the survival or tactical agency of the female fighters. The LRA female fighter implicitly illustrates the first; "I am a Captain, because I fought hard and mobilised many people - recruits through abduction into LRA". This is a competitive obedience to this project (Acholi manyen) not as a resultant effect of conviction but rather, interest of gaining favour with the LRA hierarchy and getting promoted and elevated. Compliance at this point is instrumentalised as an exploit or hunt for promotion and elevation.

The second is more subtle and interesting. When an LRA female fighter exclaimed "iming (stupid)" as an insult to a UPDF arrest at the battlefield, it was expressed under continued fear, fear of the 'all-seeing' spirits, and Kony himself. One needs to recall that LRA and Kony himself was famed, feared but also admired for his potentials of the terrestrially extra-ordinary, causing majority in the LRA to believe in his powers. The compelling force was no longer conviction but fear constructed around 'all-seeing' spirits and subsequent brutal punishments one would suffer when they faulted in any of the proscribed details of the *'Acholi manyen'* construct. One LRA female fighter detailed, "it was dangerous not to follow instructions carefully and faithfully. It is

painful to be punished by death and leave your children and yet they (children) are in the bush". Given these circumstantial realities, the choice was realistic, compliance in the face of dependants (children). The third is a bit more dramatic because to many female fighters, it became the rhetoric of navigation, particularly to evade being suspected and 'noticed' as a traitor, wanting or thinking to escape. The impressive show in battles and commissioned assignments (abductions, killing or looting food stuffs, burning houses, among others) while punctuated with rhetorical imagining or even utterance of *'Acholi manyen'*, gained confirmation, trust and respect in the LRA fighting system, or even special assignments and promotions.

Conclusion

That war was unthinkable without *Acholi manyen*, the repertoire of violence in which the former LRA female fighters participated like other fighters made *Acholi manyen* pervasive in the LRA war discourse and system. This reconfiguration and imagining was to reconstitute the political, economic and social landscape of Acholi. This was meant, in the estimate of the LRA, a transition from the 'outside' - the bush (a metaphor for Acholi B) that was ambiguously inhabited, to 'Acholi manyen'. This 'new' state is restructured and re-spatialized, a new 'Jerusalem' (as Acholi manyen was alternatively referred) and a *placeholder of the normal* (Prugl, 2003:339). Second, by drawing details of the female fighter battle spaces, status and rational agency, the paper connects to the broader literature on female fighter status (Coulter, 2008) buts also adds discourse and literature on the motivation of the female fighters. Therefore, it provided some understanding on the conducive production of wartime participation and violence, and in a sense, tried to enlarge certain strands of theorising (Aolain, 2013:1099) by moving beyond detailing involvement and engagement by the female fighters into the less theorised arena of motivations to fight.

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