



CONJUGAL SLAVERY IN WAR

Partnership for the Study of Enslavement, Marriage and Masculinities



Aibakyt Baekova ♦ Prof. Annie Bunting ♦ Tubman Institute

Introduction

Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) is a rebel group that originated in Northern Uganda. The LRA was accused of war crimes like systematic sexual violence, abduction and forced recruitment of men and women.

Women abducted by the LRA are widely recognized as victims of sexual violence and forced marriage, while men are seen as perpetrators. One of the purposes of this research project is to challenge the male perpetrator and female victim dichotomy.

Methodology

The findings of this research are based on the review of the articles written by the CSIW collaborators as well as my personal interpretation of the audio recording of the group discussion that involved 6 male former LRA combatants and took place in Kampala, Uganda in summer of 2017.

The history and culture behind masculinity

Acholi men of Northern Uganda were recruited for the armed forces and police during the British colonial rule and Obote regime. They were blamed for atrocities in Central Uganda, which justified the Ugandan Army's violence against Northerners later on during Museveni's presidency.¹

In Acholi culture, men are expected to provide, protect as well as be fathers and husbands. Inability to meet these expectations leads to the sense of personal failure and humiliation in the community, known as "crisis of masculinity."²

Key Findings

- **Violence as a survival mechanism:**

"And sometimes, they make you to, they force you to have sex with those girls. And you do not have a choice even if the girl is extremely young. If you say no, you will be killed."

Different forms of violence were exercised against both men and women abducted by the LRA. Men were also forced to kill and rape as a means to socialize them into the LRA combatant forces and the "new Acholi nation" strategy.³ Refusal to obey instructions could cost a life.

"We all beat the person till death ... you have no option but just to do it because otherwise, you will be killed."

- **The diversity of men's experiences in the LRA:**

Men's experiences in the LRA are different and depend on the age, rank, geographic location, commander of the abductee.⁴ Male recruits are usually at the very bottom of the LRA hierarchy. Recruits are considered as disposable, forced into hard labour and tortured by commanders.⁵

"...my testicles were periodically beaten on several occasions..."

- **Post-conflict stigma and silence:**

LRA returnees are demonized by the community, denied of support by NGOs and the state, lack education and training and suffer from physical and mental health complications. All these factors prevent them from performing their traditional role as protectors, providers, husbands, and fathers.⁶

Hegemonic Masculinity

- Cultural expectations of men as:
- Providers
- Protectors
- Husbands
- Fathers

Militarized Masculinity

- Acholi men in the military during colonial rule → Justification of violence against northerners
- Violence as a survival mechanism in the LRA

Emasculation in Conflict

- Sexual violence against men themselves and their families
- Inability to protect their family

Post-Conflict

Crisis of Masculinity

- Failure to earn money
- No resources to pay bride price or marry
- Violence against oneself and others
- NGOs replace men as providers

Figure 1. Different states of masculinity.



Photo by Charles Nambasi. The Uganda People's Forces Soldier.



Photo by Adam Pletts-Reuters. The leader of the LRA, Joseph Kony and his officers in Nabanga, South Sudan.

