‘I FEEL OUT OF PLACE’:
CHILDREN BORN INTO THE LORD’S RESISTANCE ARMY
AND THE POLITICS OF BELONGING

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

The Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

(Gender, Race, Sexuality and Social Justice)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)

December 2017

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Abstract

In the aftermath of nearly three decades of conflict in northern Uganda, children born into the rebel group the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) experience social, economic, and political exclusion. Thousands were born to mothers and often fathers who were abducted by the LRA and forced to marry inside the rebel group. The children are part of a global population of people born of sexual violence in conflict. This dissertation contributes to the small but growing body of work on this population called ‘children born of war.’ Using a child-centered methodology, this study is grounded in the everyday experiences of 29 children born into the LRA, with data collected at various points over a period of eight months between 2011 and 2016 in northern Uganda. The following research questions guided my inquiry: 1) How do the children experience their everyday social lives? 2) How do they make sense of their experiences? 3) What strategies and resources do they use or access to help navigate their everyday lives? 4) What macro and micro processes lend insight into or explain these experiences?

To answer these questions, I developed a conceptual framework consisting of the ideas of a) the politics of belonging, inclusive of place-based, and b) nation-building and hegemonic masculinity. The findings point to the role of place-making in shaping the children’s social experiences. Careful examination of their everyday lives reveals the children’s efforts to negotiate the boundaries of their exclusion in effort to navigate toward better positions in life. Through drawings, journals, storytelling, and play, I interpret how the children make sense of their experiences and construct a sense of legitimacy despite their marginalization. By situating
their experiences within current and historical political forces, their everyday experiences be-
come intelligible as central to a local and national politics of belonging.
Lay Summary

In the aftermath of nearly three decades of conflict, children born into the rebel group the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda experience marginalization in their communities. Thousands were born to mothers and often fathers who were abducted and forced to marry inside the LRA. Based on eight months of research over five years, this thesis explores the everyday lives of 29 children born into the LRA. It seeks to explain how the children understand who they are and where they come from, their efforts to lead productive lives, and the causes of their marginalization.

The study found that the war was used to advance national political goals in ways that contributed to local communities’ difficulties welcoming children with rebel fathers. Despite the deep historical and political roots of their exclusion, the children in this study attempt to overcome their discrimination and try to belong with limited success.
Preface

While the fieldwork for this dissertation was conducted with assistance from the Ugandan organization the Justice and Reconciliation Project, this dissertation is an original intellectual product of the author, Beth W. Stewart. I acknowledge the commitment and work of my research assistant, Aloyo Proscovia, who translated and transcribed Acholi language audio to written form. Transcription of English language audio was done by myself, consulting with the Proscovia for cultural meanings of certain phrases. All photographs were taken by myself. Ethics approval was granted through The University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board (H11-01745, August 29 2011).

A version of Chapters Four, Five, and Seven was published by the Justice and Reconciliation Project:

Stewart, B. (2015). We Are All the Same: Experiences of Children Born into LRA Captivity. The Justice and Reconciliation Project, Gulu, Uganda.

A version of Chapter Three is forthcoming in an article:

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Acknowledgements

This journey has brought so many treasured people into my life and the dissertation is thus truly a work of collaboration. My gratitude is due to them all and I mention but a few here.

Most importantly, to the children in this dissertation who are the true authorities of this subject. I am humbled that you entrusted me with your stories and secrets. Thank you for allowing me to be part of your lives all these years – it has been an honour and a joy. I hope I have done justice in representing your lives. Also to your brave and loving mothers for sharing their memories, hopes, and fears. You and your children have given me hope in this world by showing me the resilience and depth of humanity.

To my sister Prossy (Aloyo Proscovia) whose dedication to this project and care for the children was endless. Thank you for the thoughtful discussions, guidance, friendship, sisterhood, laughs, and tears. You will always be a part of my life.

A very special thank you to Evelyn Amony (and family) for your friendship, guidance, and endless support ensuring the success of this project. Also to Grace Acan, Victoria Nyanjura, and Nancy Apiyo for your friendship, insights, and our discussions, and everyone else at the Justice and Reconciliation Project who supported me and this research.

To my supervisor, Erin Baines. I cannot thank you enough for your friendship, patience, and intellectual mentorship. Your sensitivity to my constant struggles and endless encouragement were vital to my perseverance. Thank you for giving me this incredible opportunity. And to my other committee members, Pilar Riaño-Alcalá – your questions and inputs challenged and encouraged me to continue, go further, and never get too comfortable - and
Philippe Le Billon – I will always be most grateful to you for introducing me to Erin so many years ago.

To my parents for their unwavering support for me to continue when I could not. My privilege was never lost on me. This would not be without you. Also to my sister and brother for your encouragement.

To my children, Thomas, Forrest, and Luke for enduring a lifetime on this journey. I love you. You always reminded me to stop and appreciate the joy in my life. And also to their father for his sacrifice and patience.

To my many brilliant friends/scholars in Canada and Uganda who have offered support in all kinds of ways at various points. Especially Bjorg Hjartardottir, Laura Lee, Juliane Okot Bitek, Brenda Fitzpatrick, Ketty Anyeko, Sarah Davidson, Sarah Rudrum, Boniface Ojok, Sara Schroeder, Mary Stern, Ildi Kovacs, Kirby Huminuik, Scott Maxwell, Omer Ajazi, Lara Rosenoff Gauvin, James Onono-Ojok, Adam Rudder, Petra Mikulan, Jodie Martinson, Claudia Páez, Tyrell R, Lindsay McClain Opiyo, Zaira Petruf, Holly Porter, Charlotte Velazco, Anika Tilland-Stafford, Manuela Valle, Erik Price, Robin Evans, Katherine Fobear, Sonya Iwasuik, Donna Seto, Sylvie Bodineau, Cheryl Heykoop, Erin Jesse, Oralia Gomez-Ramirez, Ricardo Chaparro, Sarah Youngblutt, Alice Achan, Mascha Gugganigová, Christine Bowden, the MDC gang, Letha Victor, Alison McConnell, Tal Nitsan, Eunyoung Choi, Peter Dauvergne, and Julia Hunter.

To my sources of funding: The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council’s Doctoral Fellowship, the Doctoral Award at the International Development Research Centre, the University of British Columbia, and numerous grants as a Liu Scholar from the Liu Institute for Global Issues.
1. Introduction: ‘You Should Write How We Started Living There and Then We Grew and Then Returned’

In 1998, leaders from the four major religious denominations in northern Uganda (Catholicism, Anglican, Orthodox Christian, and Islamic) created the Acholi\(^1\) Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) in a joint effort to promote reconciliation and a peaceful end to the war that began in 1986. The group pushed for a negotiated rather than military solution to the conflict and played a critical role in initiating and driving talks between the warring factions - the rebel group the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and the Ugandan government. In 2006, an Acholi bishop took part in an ARLPI peace initiative near Atiak, just south of the Sudanese (now South Sudanese) border. Now retired and sitting in his quiet home in Gulu town, the administrative and commercial centre of northern Uganda, the bishop shared with me how, during that meeting near Atiak, members of the LRA handed over a young child who had been born into the rebel group. “I brought one child from the bush myself. A baby,” he explained, invoking the common term of ‘the bush’ to refer to the place where war happens, where the rebels lived and where this child had been born. “When the LRA were going to their assembly point,” he continued,

They asked me to support them with food supplies. Some people were to bring food to me. I was the one to deliver. They didn’t want somebody else. So, when we went to Atiak, in the bush there, they handed over to us a child of about two years. The mother

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\(^1\) Acholi is the predominant ethnic group in northern Uganda.
was killed on the front line, the father was shot in the eye. So, they could not continue with the baby. The baby also had very bad malaria. So, they decided to hand over this child to us and we brought the child home.2

Like others who were born into the LRA, this young child’s mother and possibly father were abducted as children by the rebel group. Up to 2006,3 estimates suggest that the LRA abducted between 24,000 to 38,000 children and 28,000 to 37,000 adults (Pham et al., 2007) to serve as porters, soldiers, domestic servants, and ‘wives’ (Baines, 2011; Pham et al., 2009). The image below is a depiction of the violent abductions. “This is what I saw,” explained the child who drew it, a boy in this study.

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2 This reference to ‘home’ has two possible meanings. First, while Atiak is in the Acholi sub-region, ‘home’ in this sense may refer to a place away from where the war happens, away from the ‘bush’. The bush generally represents the place where the war happens. As will be demonstrated in this dissertation, the word ‘home’ has significant cultural meaning and is used in reference to the village of one’s paternal family. Therefore, in this latter sense of the word, the bishop may have meant that they took the child home to his father’s village.

3 By 2007, the LRA had shifted its operations into the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Central African Republic (CAR), where it continued abducting and terrorizing villages, although it is now estimated to be a force of only roughly one hundred fighters spread over three countries (DRC, CAR, and South Sudan). A social worker I spoke to had recently worked for a rehabilitation centre in eastern DRC with children born into the LRA with Zande (Congolese) mothers and Acholi fathers.
While the majority of abductions occurred after 1996 (Blattman & Annan, 2010), abducted girls were being forced to marry and give birth as early as 1991, if not earlier. During this time, thousands of children were born in the bush, conceived as a result of forced marriages in the LRA. Like the young child the bishop brought home from the peace talk, many children born into the LRA lost one or both parents. If they lived to transition out of the bush, most did

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4 I personally met one young person who was born into the LRA in 1991. Their mother had been abducted and forced to marry a top commander. I have not heard evidence or found documentation of children born earlier.

5 A local organization in northern Uganda (Watye ki gen) attempted to document the number of children currently living in the north. They recorded 952, but by the publication of their report (2015) they had not yet reached all areas and many were either unaware of their efforts or were hesitant to come forward. From my own research, I estimate that approximately 2,500 to 3,000 children were born in the bush. This accounts for the hundreds, and very possibly over a thousand, who died before getting out of the war (deaths at birth, from illness/malnutrition, abandonment, killed in battle, or lost) as well as those who died after. To date, there has been no effort to document the children who died before transitioning out of the bush.
so with their mothers, others were brought out alone, or in rare cases they came with both parents.\(^6\)

Children born into the LRA\(^7\) are part of a global population of children born of wartime sexual violence, who are referred to as ‘children born of war.’ Like many other children born of war, children born into the LRA experience rejection by their families, communities, and nation.\(^9\) In 2016, I spoke to James,\(^10\) an Acholi social worker with over two decades of experience working with war-affected children in northern Uganda.\(^11\) Reflecting on his observations of how families received the girls and young women who returned from captivity, James explained,

They would find it easy to accept their own daughter but not this child here. And some of them were born to rebel commanders who committed a lot of atrocities… It's very difficult because, for example, if your daughter was at school, was taken away in captivity, and she returns back with a child for whom you don't know the father or is born to some of these commanders that have committed a lot of atrocities in this sub-region. So, it is really difficult to accept.

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\(^6\) I have yet to hear of a case in which the child returned only with their father.

\(^7\) I refer to this population of children as ‘children born into the LRA’, rather than the more common refrain, ‘children born in captivity’. I chose to do this, with approval from the study’s participants, to avoid the limitations inherent in the term captivity. Their experiences in the bush cannot uniformly be described as living in captivity.

\(^8\) I discuss the use of the term ‘born of war’ in the next section, although it is worth mentioning that the term is problematic in that it makes war the primary marker of their identities, rather than being a child born of a mother and father.

\(^9\) There are only rare cases in which children born into the LRA experienced rejection by their biological parents, which is reportedly not the usual case among children born of war. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, for example, there were widespread accounts of maternal infanticide by Bosnian women who had been raped by Serbian forces.

\(^10\) Pseudonym.

\(^11\) There is much debate among the Acholi, as well as nationally and internationally about the initial causes behind the war. Various scholars (Allen & Vlassenroot, 2010; Behrend, 1999; Boas, 2004; Dolan, 2009; Finström, 2008; Lamwaka, 2014; Oloya, 2013) trace the beginnings of the war and point to an array of forces that led to and shaped the war, such as omission from national economic and development prosperity, the proliferation of regional and ethnic allegiances. They also point to various competing discourses defining its scope and causes. In other words, it remains contested whether it began as a “popular rebellion” against the government forces or not.
The bishop I spoke to was an active religious leader in Gulu during the conflict and he also recalls the resistance to welcoming the children:

From my general understanding of the children born in the bush, this has been a big challenge in my mind and is going to be a big challenge to the community. In the first place when they first came out, I was in my office, I remember. People didn't want them… The perception of the people is that these are, how do I describe? These are bush children. They are not born in our home… That's why the people look at them as not normal children… So, the community here were looking at the children, that's not part of them.

Despite efforts by the ARLPI, as well as other community leaders who called on Acholi communities to welcome and integrate children born into the LRA, they remain socially, economically, and politically marginalized.

When I travelled to northern Uganda for the first time in 2011, a group of mothers of children born into the LRA reported to me that organizations and researchers have paid very little attention to the problems their children face. Save for several reports published in 2015 by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and one recent journal article (Denov & Lakor, 2017), the actual voices of children born into the LRA are largely absent from policy and scholarly literature. During that first visit to Gulu, a mother explained to me, “No one has written about [the children], although the children are always there… they are growing and can speak for themselves.” On my next visit, Junior (a boy in this study) advised, “You should write how we started living there and then we grew and then returned.” This study is a response to that gap in scholarship and to this insistence to prioritize the children’s voices and experiences.

Taking a participatory child-centered approach, this study explores the everyday lives of 29 children born into the LRA, as well as reflections from their mothers and key community figures in Gulu town. Research was conducted for a total of eight months over a five-year
period (2011, 2013, 2014, 2016) with additional full day activities at the end of every school term (three times per year) since the beginning of 2012. Data was generated through drawing, interviews, group discussions, journals, home visits, and play. To ground this dissertation in the voices of the children, I sought to understand how they experienced their everyday lives. I also wanted to identify the forces shaping their lives. As such, the following research questions guided my inquiry:

1. How do the children experience their everyday social lives?
2. How do they make sense of their experiences?
3. What strategies and resources do they use or access to help navigate their everyday lives?
4. What macro and micro processes lend insight into or explain these experiences?

To answer these questions, I have interpreted their experiences and the relevant context through a conceptual framework including the politics of belonging, nation-building, and hegemonic masculinity. In doing so, I am able to situate and make sense of the children’s experiences in relation to larger systems and processes of power. While the focus of this thesis is to understand the subjectivities of the children, making this connection visible situates the experiences of the children as a national and international problem of accountability and responsibility with regards to the war from which they were born.

1.1 What Is Known About Children Born of War

1.1.1 Who Are 'Children Born of War'?

Approximately 500,000 living 'children born of war' reportedly inhabit the ‘shadows’ of communities around the world (Carpenter et al., 2005; Grieg, 2001). In addition to those born of
wartime rape and sexual exploitation, this number also includes children born of mutually consensual sexual relations between local women and foreign soldiers in wartime (Grieg, 2001). Considering the widespread nature of sexual violence in war, Charli Carpenter (2010) insists the children resulting from rape or exploitation must therefore constitute a "massive global underclass" (p. 4) with tens of thousands born of war in the last decade of the twentieth century alone (Grieg, 2001). While the scholarly interest in children born of war is relatively recent, their existence and social mobilization around their situation are not new phenomena.  

For instance, adult Norwegian war children from WWII started the War and Children Identity Project (WCIP) after winning a suit against the government for failing to protect them from discrimination. The project situates the case of Norwegian children born of war in a global context and its 2001 report provides the most comprehensive assessment of the number of children born of war available. Their numbers include babies born of World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War, the Indonesian occupation of East Timor, Liberia, Rwanda, and the most researched case of Bosnia Herzegovina, to name just a few. Estimates, however, remain rough. For example, WCIP reported between 2,000 and 5,000 children born of wartime rape in Rwanda during the genocide and between 6,000 and 25,000 during the war in Liberia in the 1990s (Grieg, 2001). In 2005, the University of Pittsburgh's Ford Institute for Human Security published an additional report, assessing the humanitarian response and knowledge about this group of child survivors who were born of wartime sexual violence and exploitation. The authors' primary conclusion was that "knowledge and awareness regarding children born of war

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12 Rape and the abduction of women for purpose of reproduction have been occurring since the advent of armed conflicts (Grieg, 2001). A small body of work exists documenting the stories of and issues around children born from contemporary wars, most notably WWII (Fehrenbach, 2005; Mochmann & Larsen, 2008; Rains, Rains & Jarratt, 2006; Ericsson & Simonsen, 2005) and Vietnam (Bass, 1996; DeBonis, 1995; McKelvey, 1999; Yarborough, 2005). Most of these, however, include children born of mutually consensual relationships, which is not the category this dissertation speaks to.
within the humanitarian sector is extremely limited" (Carpenter et al., 2005, p. 8). From all accounts, children born of war around the world occupy a social space that lies beyond the margins of society.

The generality of the term "born of war" makes it difficult to produce accurate data and numbers of how many exist today, while current literature spans the globe and history. Ingvill Mochmann (2008; 2009; Mochmann & DeTombe, 2010; Mochmann & Lee, 2010), who is also a key member of the International Network for Interdisciplinary Research on Children Born of War,\(^{13}\) and her co-authors make the case that children born of war (old and young) constitute a significant population worthy of critical study across time and the world. They also offer methodological considerations for moving forward with research. Most notably, they argue that although children born of war can be best divided into four categories - 1) children of enemy soldiers, 2) children of soldiers from occupation forces, 3) children of child soldiers and 4) children of peacekeeping forces - all the children no matter their location or category are said to suffer some form of discrimination from their families and communities (Mochmann & Lee, 2010).

Mochmann’s definitions would likely classify children born into the LRA as children of child soldiers (although many fathers and some mothers were not children). WCIP’s classification would categorize them as children born of wartime sexual violence (Grieg, 2001). Charli Carpenter (2007) defines the term children born of war “to refer to persons of any age conceived as a result of violent, coercive, or exploitative sexual relations in conflict zones” (p. 3). Forced marriage is a “coercive relationship without valid consent of the female” (Annan et al., 2009, p. 9), and falls within the definition of “rape” put forward by the International Criminal

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\(^{13}\) Children Born of War: International Network for Interdisciplinary Research on Children Born of War (INIRC-CBOW) http://www.childrenbornofwar.squarespace.com
Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), which states that rape is “a physical invasion of a sexual nature, committed on a person under circumstances which are coercive” (MacKinnon, 2005, p. 942). Both categories (children of child soldiers and children born of wartime sexual violence) describe the children born into the LRA, but for the sake of advancing a coherent definition in the scholarship, I use the definition put forward by Carpenter.\textsuperscript{14} Whether they were actually born among the rebels or after their mothers returned home, children born into the LRA are 'marked' by the context of their conception.

1.1.2 Life as a Child Born of War

Voices of children born of war remain widely absent from research about children and armed conflict in which interest has largely focused on child soldiers and displaced children figure most prominently in current scholarship (Honwana, 2006; Singer, 2005; Wessells, 2006). The small but growing body of literature addressing children born of war is based on their mothers’ perspectives and remains largely descriptive, failing to explain the unique subject position of children. Within the context of this growing field, new empirical work is emerging from studies of northern Uganda and other places affected by wartime sexual violence.

As mentioned, much of the current scholarship that contributes to knowledge about how the children live in their local contexts is grounded in the experiences of the mothers - both in terms of how the children are part of her stigmatized identity (she is stigmatized, in part, because of them) and how she perceives them and their challenges. In her extensive study of female ex-combatants of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone, Chris Coulter (2009) touches on the issue of young mothers who struggled to love and care for children who

\textsuperscript{14} Most recent scholarship about “children born of war” refers to children born of wartime sexual violence.
were born in rebel captivity. Giulia Baldi and Megan MacKenzie (2007) provide a similar account of these “rebel babies” in Sierra Leone. Both Coulter (2009) and Baldi and MacKenzie (2007) found that the children contributed to their mothers' undesirable social identities when it came to their reception by their families or finding a new partner.

Also based on mothers’ experiences, Theidon (2015) brings attention to the fact that children born of rape in Peru are largely absent from current studies and she provides suggestions for future research. She argues that the focus on sexual violence has obscured the children born of such violations. Drawing on women's stories from her own research and reports of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, she challenges the "absent presence" of the children in literature about the war and reconciliation, and more importantly, she defines key points of entry for emerging research agendas that centre on the case of children born of war in diverse contexts. In particular, Theidon (2015) recommends longitudinal studies to examine if the stigma of their identities "follow them throughout their lives, or are there ways of escaping the labels and changing one's fate?" And, "[D]o children born of rape pass the mark across generations?" (p. S199) As the children born into the LRA move into adulthood, this line of inquiry - to assess how their pasts exist in their present and how their backgrounds may impact their futures - seems urgent.

In the case of northern Uganda, quantitative studies pointed that women who had children in the LRA found that they faced more challenges when they returned than those who returned without children. Storytelling methods highlighted the mothers’ subjective sense of their belonging (Baines & Rosenoff Gauvin 2014; Baines & Stewart 2011). Such work illuminates their struggles as single mothers often without the support of extended family or support from their child’s father. In Lango district, just south of the Acholi sub-region but still deeply
impacted by abductions, Apio Eunice Otuko (2016) found that women who returned with children contradicted local notions of gender and kinship. Having children in the bush without the sanctioned cultural practices and transactions required, was experienced locally as contesting the patriarchal control over the cultural and social institution of womanhood. In a somewhat similar vein, Holly Porter (2013; 2016) found that the sexual violence perpetrated in the LRA violated Acholi cultural norms in such ways that the resulting children are particularly unwelcome. Returning mothers in both Acholi and Langi contexts were shown to perform motherhood and womanhood according to cultural expectations in order to repair relationships and to position their children as culturally legitimate (Baines & Rosenoff Gauvin, 2014; Baines & Stewart, 2011; Apio, 2016). How the children negotiate their own belonging and identities, however, remains unknown. The focus of inquiry for this dissertation is located as the next steps addressing Theidon’s concern for the impact of their pasts and informed by the above questions about belonging and identity in the Acholi context.

In separate studies, both Myriam Denov (2015) and Apio (2007) identify particular needs of children born into the LRA to inform programming and service providers. Using interviews with children and their mothers in a reception centre in Gulu district, Apio found that the children faced a number of cultural, health, and material challenges. She concluded that Acholi cultural practices did not support the integration of children born in the bush and most experienced significant scarcity of basic needs (such as food, clothing, and adequate shelter). While mothers struggled to support their children, the children’s health was often problematic as a result of experiences in the bush, including psychological distress and lack of available and appropriate services. Apio found that the wellbeing of their children deeply affected their mothers’ wellbeing, which suggests that research with and about children born into the LRA
would benefit from including the perspectives of mothers, an implication taken up by this dissertation.

Drawing on secondary literature, Denov (2015) identified similar problems faced by children born into the LRA and called for primary research with the children themselves. In response, a subsequent article by Denov and Atim Angela Lakor (2017) draws on empirical research with 50 children born into the LRA. The children in their study identified similar challenges as those outlined above by Apio (2007). Interestingly (and not supported by my own research), they found that the children claimed that life in the bush during the war was better than their current situation. Focusing on this extreme self-assessment of their lives, Denov and Lakor suggest it exemplifies the extent of their sense of marginalization. Such a reflection that war could be better than ‘peace,’ they argue, relates to the absence of structures of support that left when the conflict ended - the support of NGOs, in particular, that had filled the void left by social and cultural systems destroyed by the violence. By highlighting the children’s victimhood, the article illustrates the need for the policy recommendations identified by the children, including livelihood programs, education, community sensitization and reconciliation, and psycho-social support. While the above pieces are necessary to actuate critically needed interventions, this dissertation seeks to situate such concerns about wellbeing within the larger systems of power responsible for their conceptions.

This direction is taken up somewhat by the only empirical child-centered academic publications that I am aware of, other than the Denov and Lakor (2017) study. These are two articles based on interviews with 19 adolescent girls who were born of wartime rape in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Erjavec & Volcic, 2010a; 2010b). Using a life stories methodology, Erjavec
and Volcic found a number of discursive consistencies across their stories and how they represent themselves. Most significantly, they found that regardless of whether people knew they were conceived through rape or not, the girls internalized the shame, the "sins of their fathers" (2010a, p. 359). These “sins,” they explain, are constructs of the local patriarchal and nationalist ideology.

Where Denov and Lakor (2017) suggest the children’s sense of marginalization reflects the absence of effective structures of support, these articles conceptualize their marginalization as being part of a continuum of violence. That is, by centering the voices of the children, the authors make claims about the ongoing violence that continues from the war at all levels, charging that this remains because there has not been "meaningful forms of reconciliation" (2010b, p. 382). NGO reports about children born into the LRA draw similar conclusions - the children's lives are not improving with time and they remain on the margins of their society burdened by the legacies of the war that are imbedded in their identities and experiences of structural violence (Ladisch, 2015; McClain Opiyo, 2015; Stewart, 2015). By linking the discursive patterns in their self-presentations to larger political forces, Erjavec and Volcic’s study reflects the work of Das (2007) and Seto (2013; 2015), which suggest that children born of war are socially excluded for the purpose of masculine nation building projects; an argument that will be discussed further in the next section on my conceptual framework.

Most of the above scholars make the case for an immediate and dedicated field of study on children born of wartime sexual violence. This dissertation builds on the representations of marginalization and powerlessness in the face of large systems of power. It aims to not only understand their positionality and marginalization in context, but by drawing on the methodologies and ideas from studies about mothers of children born into the LRA (Baines &
Rosenoff Gauvin, 2014; Baines & Stewart, 2011). This dissertation will seek to also understand the children’s sense of who they are and how they move within these structures and systems to improve their lives and challenge their marginalization.

1.2 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a network of interconnecting concepts that together provide a comprehensive understanding of a studied phenomenon (Jabareen, 2009). In the case of this dissertation, I employ the following concepts: a) the politics of belonging; and, b) the role of hegemonic masculinity in nation-building. Each of these key concepts relate to each other in ways that facilitate an understanding of the everyday experiences of the children in the study, as explored below.

1.2.1 The Politics of Belonging

The concept of belonging generates important insights into the experiences of the children. It is also an integral part of the experience of the people of northern Uganda in their country. Belonging is a sense of being in a society and must be analyzed both as a personal feeling of emotions and as a discursive construction of socio-spatial boundaries of inclusion and exclusion (Antonsich, 2010). Nina Yuval-Davis (2011) writes that “[b]elonging is about an emotional (or even ontological) attachment, about feeling 'at home'” (p. 19). She defines 'home' as entailing a sense of hope and feeling safe, invoking notions of place attachment, or what Marco Antonsich (2010) refers to as “place-belongingness” (p. 4).

When a sense of safety and attachment are challenged or denied, when 'home' is contested, belonging becomes politicized (Yuval-Davis 2006). Within hegemonic relations of
power, belonging can seem naturalized and fixed, yet it is constantly negotiated, contested, and
never a static state. It is a dynamic process in which the boundaries defining inclusion/exclusion
are constantly challenged and reproduced, shaped by the shifting intersections of social
categories and their associated norms. Belonging is thus not "an isolated and individual affair"
(Probyn, 1996, p. 13) - it is constructed by "boundary discourses" (Antonsich, 2010, p. 12)
enacted through relations and practices that create and maintain boundaries. Power is thus fun-
damental to the politics of belonging. Yuval-Davis (2011) explains that the boundaries in-
volved in the politics of belonging sometimes physically and always symbolically divide ‘us’
and ‘them.’

Boundary-making usually involves the reproduction of norms that draw distinc-
tions between who belongs (who is normative) and who does not. In other words, the social
and cultural norms that organize and define a political entity are also used to differentiate and
exclude.

Yuval-Davis (2006) identifies three primary elements in this political project of bound-
ary-making and belonging: social locations, identity, and normative values. Each of these con-
cepts must be considered when trying to make sense of any process of exclusion and all three
are heavily interrelated and overlapping, yet they cannot be reduced to each other. Social lo-
cations refer to the positionality of people in relation to power dynamics within various social
categories, such as race, place of birth, language, and gender. Normative values are the atti-
tudes and ideologies that assess social locations and constructions of identities. Identities are
how people perceive themselves and others.

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15 The process of creating and reproducing boundaries is also reflected in the concept of ‘bordering’ (Newman, 2006; Van Houtum & Van Naerssen, 2002). Borders, in this sense, give order to our lives and are used in the construction of Others. While their meanings are much the same, I chose to use the terms boundary and boundary-making because these are the terms most commonly used in scholarship about the politics of belonging, especially Yuval-Davis (2011), whose conceptualization I draw on heavily.
Marco Antonsich (2010), however, points to a gap in Yuval-Davis' (2006) framework of belonging. "[T]he question 'Who am I?'” he writes, “Cannot be isolated from the other question 'Where do I belong?'” (p. 7). The social exclusion of the children in this study plays out on an additional analytical level missing from Yuval-Davis' theorization - place. According to John Agnew (1987), place is comprised of three aspects: the location (the objective physical location), the locale (the setting for social relations), and the sense of place (the affective attachment to place). The politics of belonging is most concerned with the process of producing and reproducing place. Places do not inherently have meanings. Rather, places are spaces that have been given meaning (Tuan, 1977) in a process of “place-making” (Cresswell, 2004). This social construction of place is thus part of the process of drawing boundaries in the politics of belonging.

I suggest that experiences, narratives, and everyday engagements of children born into the LRA reveal the forces shaping the boundaries of their exclusion. I will now examine each of these four elements of the politics of belonging – social locations, normative values, identity, and place - to understand how they are essential to answering my research questions.

The children in this study exist on the margins of their society, in social locations shaped by multiple intersecting axes of oppression - namely, poverty, place of birth, fathers’ identities, and health. Their social locations are fluid and dynamic, reflecting relations of power at play in shaping their subject positions and consequently their everyday experiences. Occupying marginalized social space, their ability to navigate the myriad forces shaping their lives is significantly constrained. Yet this dissertation looks beyond the question of how they are acted upon, to ask how the children contest and make sense of who they are in response and in relation to their marginality.
Social navigation (Utas, 2005; Vigh, 2008; 2009) refers to an individual’s movement around and within the social forces that affect their everyday lives, with the aim of navigating toward better positions. I suggest that the children in this study negotiate the forces in their lives in an effort to navigate toward better opportunities and a future in which their pasts will not have much impact on their lives. In short, the children challenge the boundaries of their positionalities to negotiate a partial, or limited, belonging.

Identities are constructed through personal and/or collective narratives about who you are and who you are not. They reflect emotional attachments and desires, and involve "processes of being and becoming, belonging and longing to belong" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 202). Stuart Hall (1990) reminds us that identities (like belonging itself) are never static, they undergo constant transformation, subject to forces of history, culture, and power. In Yuval-Davis' (2011) conceptualization, identities are inherently relational because there will always be what Judith Butler (1993) refers to as "excess," or something left outside the boundaries. The self and non-self are not mutually exclusive, which is implied in the notion of becoming. Inclusion and exclusion, however, are not always mutual (Yuval-Davis, 2006), which is a key point for the children in this study as they employ strategies to negotiate a partial belonging. As this dissertation will demonstrate, the children encounter boundaries of belonging in which they are left outside. However, through telling stories about where they come from, who they are, and where they belong, the children construct themselves as legitimate members of their communities and nation.

The birth of the children in this study are a consequence of a war that is now (arguably) in the past. The narratives they tell about themselves sometimes include this aspect of their story (remembering belonging and challenging the imagery of their fathers, for example),
which I suggest represent negotiations of the past in the present. In the "grey spaces between war and peace" (Rae Olson, 2004, p. 145) during the Guatemalan Truth Commission, Krisjon Rae Olson (2004) demonstrate how children use memory to make sense of their world and mediate material forces. Rae Olsen positions young people as versatile, resilient, and who craft their identities in response to both their pasts and the current political landscape. While Das (2007) refers to adults, she similarly looks to the temporal depth used to construct subjectivity through negotiations of the past in the present.

While children have not attained full cognitive development, recent childhood studies posit that adult-led research about children tends to omit their subjectivities and speak for them (Tisdall, 2014). Savyasaachi and Udi Mandel Butler (2014) argue that the study of child participation in social and political life must be disentangled from theories of childhood that are embedded with power dynamics privileging adult perspectives. Rather, children have complex cultures and experiences - “life-worlds” (p. 58) - that contribute to an evolving sense of self. Nevertheless, the lives of young people are inevitably monitored and regulated by the adult world around them. Also, occupying marginalized social space, the power of the children in this study to navigate the forces shaping their lives is significantly constrained.

Through telling stories about where they come from, who they are, and where they belong, the children in this study construct themselves as legitimate members of their communities and nation. Like the youth in Guatemala, the children navigate the temporal and relational forces in their lives to create a sense of self with which they challenge their exclusion and attempt to alter the conditions that could constitute them as legitimate political subjects in their communities and nation. The boundaries that govern relations of power are defined through
practices and actions that reflect normative beliefs. Norms are the cultural and social expectations that guide behaviour and which are informed by shared rules among members of an entity. The norms of places, for example, inform actions and practices, and those who conform to normative expectations belong, or are “in place.”

In this way, norms generate the practice of stigmatization. Such policing of norms aims to control the boundaries that exclude. The stigma the children experience is a reaction to the transgressions of children born into the LRA - the children’s actions may not be exceptional, but their presence is transgressive because they were born ‘there’ and not ‘here’. They are judged to be outsiders and disrupters of normality. This policing of norms as part of the process of social reconstruction is particularly prominent in schools, which will be explored in Chapter Four.

The children are said to have been "born in (or from) the bush." The "bush" (*lum*) is the term used to refer to the war, where the rebels fight and live. Opiyo Oloya (2013) notes that the derogatory term *'olum'* refers to people who returned from the bush, literally meaning "the one who belongs to the bush." Others (Okello & Hovil, 2007; Mergelsberg, 2010) have emphasized the moral distinction between the bush and home in the specific context of this war. The bush, according to Holly Porter (2013), has significant cultural meaning. It represents the place of otherness, a place beyond the boundaries of morality. The children's identities are tightly bound to the place of their conceptions. The implication being that their parents had sex in the bush - in the wrong place - which carries heavy cosmological consequences. Born

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16 Porter (2013) explains that the Acholi word literally means “the grass' but it is widely translated into English as bush. In fact, another way of saying 'rebel' is to say literally, 'the people of the grass/bush' *jo me lum.*" (p. 247)

17 Such cosmological consequences include bad dreams, missed opportunities in life (such as education), financial hardship, injury, illness (such as HIV), and illness of the children (Porter, 2013; Baines, 2007).
'from the bush' meant they did not belong where everyone was born 'from here.' The common taunt, "You from the bush!" is one of the many practices of boundary marking the children encounter in their everyday lives. In this way, the children as Others are spatially constructed because they belong 'there' and not 'here'.

Trudeau (2006) explains that classifying certain characteristics "as fundamentally different, foreign and unacceptable is a political manoeuvre intended to remove putatively contradictory characteristics and behaviours from a polity and its associated territory" (p. 423). Place-making can therefore be used to both claim belonging and deny belonging to others. Pilar Riaño-Alcalá (2006) found that in a context of violence and displacement in Medellin, Colombia, place is rendered meaningful through memory practices. Another study similarly demonstrates how refugees, displaced persons, and diasporic populations also use memory work to construct a sense of place (Low, 2017). Other research (for example, Blokland, 2008; Lawson et al., 2010), however, highlight the role of place in segregation and discrimination of stigmatized populations.

In writing about Acholi culture, Acholi anthropologist Okot p'Bitek (1986) argued that society is, in a sense, mirrored against the social exclusion of individuals: "The so-called 'outcast' is not a free agent. Being 'cast out' from society... does not sever the chains that bind a man to society. The act is a judgement, punishment and a lesson, not only for the victim, but for all members of the society" (p. 20). In other words, the act of exclusion, or the judgement that defines who belongs and who does not, implicates and characterizes the whole of society and not only the one outcast. A history of place-biased state and colonial policies (which will be reviewed in Chapter Three) helped shape the politics of belonging in the Acholi sub-region in which children born into the LRA are actively excluded.
Following Independence (1962), northern Uganda remained less economically developed than the south and socially, economically, and politically marginalized. During the war, widespread atrocities committed by the National Resistance Army (NRA) accompanied the government’s forcible displacement of more than 90 percent of the Acholi population, resulting in widespread disconnection from tekwaro (culture/tradition/history) (Rosenoff Gauvin, 2013, p. 36) and a feeling of being cut off from the Ugandan nation (Finnström, 2008). At the same time, the LRA destroyed homes and villages and abducted people to populate both its ranks and a new and pure Acholi nation (Baines, 2014) and displaced people even from the internally displaced persons (IDP) camps (Finnström, 2008). In other words, the war involved a territorial takeover from both sides. After the war, many Acholi began the process of reclaiming not just their ancestral land, but also other places that had been affected by the violence and upheaval of conflict, such as schools and town centres. By physically re-inhabiting their ancestral villages and urban centres and re-occupying schools, the Acholi are “remaking place” (Anguelovski, 2013). That is, despite the histories of violence embedded in these places, active efforts aim to reclaim them and imbue them with new meanings, ones that move them away from the (embodiment of) violence and fear and consequently reject children born into the LRA. This process of remaking place involves a claim to political belonging in the nation.

1.2.2 Nation Building and Hegemonic Masculinity

The knowledge produced in this research about the everyday lives of the children is intrinsically linked to larger political processes of belonging. According to Nicola Ansell (2008), much of the research about children and place is too preoccupied with the micro-scale and is

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18 This statistic was as of 2005, according to Finnström (2008, p. 133).
“characterized by a very parochial locus of interest” (p. 190). Madeleine Dobson (2009), however, argues that downscaling a field or sub-field of research, such as her own field of migration studies, about children should come only after a focus on the micro-scale has been established. First, empirical research at the level of the everyday must be conducted to better understand “what it is actually like to be a child or young person affected by migration” (Dobson, 2009, p. 358). This applies to research of children in war, or in any number of political processes.

Louise Holt and Sarah Holloway (2006) make the case that without more research that explores how children are in their worlds in non-Western locations, the deconstruction of Eurocentric notions of childhood and what is a child remains incomplete. The research for this dissertation is accordingly focused primarily on the everyday lived experiences of the children, yet it also explores how their everyday experiences stretch across scales to larger political discursive contexts of neoliberalism, nationalism, and militarized masculinity. Connecting their experiences to macro-level politics of belonging opens the possibility for such a framework to benefit the study of children born of war in other contexts around the world.

In an effort to situate children born of war in broad political contexts and make sense of their absence in advocacy agendas, Charli Carpenter (2000; 2005; 2007; 2009; 2010; 2012) critiques international relations (IR) and feminist IR for failing to consider the children as political subjects. Carpenter (2000; 2010) analyzes the issue of children born of wartime rape in the former Yugoslavia and finds that the framework used to achieve the important legal classification of war rape as a war crime and crime against humanity, renders the children born of such violence with no rights and no legal protection. Rather than subjects of human rights law,

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19 Ansell (2008) defines scales as "relational, yet pre-existing, levels inscribing different sets of social processes" (p. 8). Scales of interest generally include the global-local nexus, scales of home, and scales of body.
the children become symbols of the crimes done to their mothers - the rape campaign is known only as "crimes against women" (Carpenter, 2000; p. 453). International and domestic media and human rights and humanitarian organizations and advocacy networks played a significant role in the reproduction of normative identities (such as victim and child), while gendered nationalism and international law marginalized children's rights in the effort to clearly identify the crime, the victim, and the perpetrator.

Donna Seto (2013; 2015) furthers the critique of feminist IR. She draws primarily on post-structural feminism to explain why and how the children are both marginalized and absent in communities and political agendas. War rape survivors, she suggests, are used as signifiers to define collectives - nations, communities, ethnicity. Those in power construct the boundaries of their positions of power through their construction of stigmas (differences that are judged negatively (Goffman, 1963), or more relevantly, through their construction of ‘others’. Seto argues that the neglect of children born of rape is strategic because “the sovereign” relies on the denigration of a given population, which in this case is children born of wartime rape - those with the identities of enemy fathers. The sovereign refers to Giorgio Agamben’s (1998) notion of the one who has the power to determine “bare life,” or who is a political subject and who is not. Seto's theorization uncovers the purpose for and mechanics of the political process that marginalizes these children, providing the beginnings of a framework with which to make sense of the exclusion of children born into the LRA. In Uganda, the survivors of wartime sexual violence are used by the state in its nation building project. The abducted Acholi women and girls are depicted by the government only as girls needing to be rescued by the national father figure (the president) as part of its project to bolster state legitimacy. This posturing fails
to acknowledge the children born to the women and girls and simultaneously undermines the value of the Acholi people.

In her study of the Partition of India, Veena Das (2007) proposes a similar approach in which she also invokes the idea of the state’s manipulation of power to construct the exclusion of children born of forced marriage. She explores the specific case of the abducted women during the Partition of India in which tens of thousands of women were abducted from either side (India and Pakistan). Das illustrates how abducted women and the children born of the forced marriages became part of the very complex process of legitimizing the masculine authority of the government, and contributing to the imagining of the nation. For example, the legislation that identified the women as belonging to a new legal category of "abducted person" and ordered their recovery, legitimized the state's claims over the women as sexual and reproductive women, suggesting order, national honour, and the purity of the population. “The problem of abducted women moved from the order of the family to the order of the state,” explains Das (2007, p. 25). Legislating the control of women’s sexuality in this way represented of its process of making a masculine nation-state. Children born of the forced marriages were identified under this legal category of “abducted person,” which helped to extend the government’s legislative power as a state modelled upon the structures inherent in patriarchy. Like Das, I situate the children born into the LRA as part of their government’s dynamic and complex masculine nation building project. Considered within this broader context, the children’s exclusion becomes visible as a consequence of local and national politics of belonging whereby the Acholi people’s exclusion at the national level contributes to the lived experiences of exclusion of children born into the LRA.
Chris Dolan (2003; 2009) effectively stresses the role of masculinities in the project of nation-building in Uganda. He suggests that masculinity, or more precisely, the ideas of a model of masculinity are the elements connecting state level dynamics with local level behaviour in Acholiland (2003, p. 3). The historical neglect of the region and discriminatory stereotypes of the Acholi as militaristic and primitive, he explains, justified the violent control of the Acholi region and facilitated a collapse of alternative masculinities, which precipitated the hegemony of a model of hyper and militarized masculinity. Furthermore, this hegemonic model both resulted from and contributed to the perpetuation of the conflict.

Dolan’s argument supports the literature above about children born of wartime sexual violence in the context of a masculine state. The use of state force represents the deployment of this hegemonic model of masculinity and it is used in the political process that constructs the marginalization of children born into the LRA. As Dolan suggests, the hegemonic model of masculinity also contributes to dynamics at the local level, shaping the politics of belonging on the ground. The interdependency of masculinity and the state in Uganda will be further explored in Chapter Three.

By bringing together the concepts of belonging and hegemonic masculinity in processes of nation-building, I situate the children’s exclusion within micro- and macro-level politics of belonging, which are enacted through discursive boundary building at the state and local levels. The children’s social locations, narratives of who they are, along with the social norms and processes of place-making contribute to the politics of belonging. Along with ideas of nation-building and a hegemonic model of masculinity, this framework reveals the forces involved in shaping the children’s experiences and how they make sense of those experiences, as well as
how they challenge the boundaries that define their exclusion to forge a limited sense of belonging. Analyzed within local and national discursive systems of power, the everyday lived experiences of children born into the LRA, as told by them, offer new insights into not only the forces affecting their lives, but how they respond to those forces.

1.3 My Positionality

I am an educated white Western feminist. I am a settler where I live, my ancestors colonized and stole the land from the indigenous people who had lived on the land I call home for thousands of years.\textsuperscript{20} I benefit from this history of brutality. I therefore go into this research from a location of racial and class privilege. As a person of privilege in the West, I have been "trained and socialized into ways of thinking, of defining and of making sense of the known and unknown" (Smith, 1999, p. 124). In an effort to mediate my power and my Eurocentric assumptions, I have been guided by the epistemology and ontology of feminist postcolonial theory, which critiques colonialism, imperialism, race, and power with an inclusive concern about gender (Lewis & Mills, 2003). In practical terms, this means I recognize that my relationships in colonized spaces are inherently unequal. This also means that I recognize the historical and ongoing privileging of Western ways of knowing, and the simultaneous dismissal, silencing, and manipulation of indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing. I have, therefore, attempted to prioritize listening and questioning my assumptions and biases that are inevitably grounded

\textsuperscript{20} Even my direct lineage from this ruthless history can be traced - one of my great, great, great grandfathers was one of the largest land proprietors on Prince Edward Island in the early-mid 1800s, which certainly forced the native Mi’kmaq people off their land. His son married the wealthy daughter of one of the ‘Fathers of the Confederation of Canada,’ an institution symbolic of the brutal oppression in this country. Every generation since has benefited and I place myself in this lineage with awareness of my consequential privilege.
in my upbringing as a privileged settler by using locally relevant methods, maintaining long-term relationships, and being self-reflexive.

The word postcolonial implies not what is after colonialism, because some argue there is "nothing 'post' about colonialism at all" (McClintock, 1994, p. 294), but rather a struggle against colonialism. Because, certainly in academia and many other structures of power, colonialism is far from over. The system of land ownership in many places, for example, perpetuates the occupation of indigenous territories. Structures of justice in Canada dispossess indigenous people of their right to exercise their own systems. In other words, postcolonialism is a process that both seeks to address social inequalities by identifying and deconstructing (neo)colonial forces, or the hegemony of the West, of "imperial eyes" (Pratt, 1992). Postcolonialism therefore is a practice of political resistance challenging Western knowledge and de-colonizing non-Western knowledge, because "research is highly institutionalized through disciplines and fields of knowledge, through communities and interest groups of scholars, and through the academy" (Smith, 1999, p. 124). This epistemic dominance is at the root of much of the highly problematic research and practice conducted by Western researchers in less economically developed nations. The civilizing project to 'save' or 'rescue' the oppressed has deep roots in colonial and missionary motivations, dubbed the "white saviour complex" (Straubhaar, 2015; Cole, 2012). The hegemony of the Western gaze and the structures of domination that it constructs is not total, however. Foucault (1980) insists that in all relations of power there is necessarily the possibility of resistance.

As a white Western researcher, a concern is that writing about the children carries the potential of turning their lives into spectacles for a Western audience, as Rey Chow (2003)

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21 My residence, as well as my University are on the unceded territory of the Musqueam people.
warns. Chow posits that the "native's" silence tells of the imperialist oppression. I recognize the silence of the children as a sign of oppression within the context of imperialism. To challenge the hegemony of Western knowledge production by rendering the children less invisible in ways that do not make spectacles of their lives, the children must not be subjugated as passive objects. I have attempted to step back and observe how the children represent their own lived realities and avoid any essentialist idealizations about their lives, which would be (neo)colonial constructions (Spivak, 2003; Mills, 2005). I have done this by minimizing my control over the methods used. For example, in activities, I provided only an initial question (such as, “What does family mean to you?”) without offering suggestions as examples. Writing field notes for daily reflexivity in which I took note of small observations and constantly questioned my actions, intentions, and conclusions.

Feminist postcolonial writers foreground colonial and postcolonial discourses of gender. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (2003) explain that "[f]eminist postcolonial theory has engaged in a two-fold project: to racialise mainstream feminist theory and to insert feminist concerns into conceptualisations of colonialism and postcolonialism" (p. 3). As such, feminist postcolonial theory encompasses a number of feminisms representing a diversity of experiences of oppression, which insist that gender and other social markers are not mutually exclusive (hooks, 1981; Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Multiple subjectivities, identities, and meanings of differences become the analytical focus in such intersectional work (Brah & Phoenix, 2004) and not gender alone. I recognize the children in this study are gendered and that invariably affects how they experience their everyday relations and engagements; their gender interacts with other aspects of their identities and social locations to shape their experiences.
This awareness of the gendered structures and discourses of (post/neo)colonialism is necessary to include both in situating the research but also in situating myself within the research, since postcolonial theory is meant to reveal as much about the colonized as it is about the colonizer. The frequent call out to white people on the streets of Gulu, "Munno!" (white person), was an everyday experience for my family and I, especially for my children ("Latin munno!"/white children) since it was much less common to see white children. This call out does not, as George Yancy (2012) writes, "reinscribe a form of race essentialism" (p. 6). Rather, Yancy sees it as naming and identifying whiteness as a site of privilege and power. Yancy encourages white people to look at themselves from outside their positions of power in order to provide a perspective that will challenge whiteness, the white self, and white social system (Cissell, 2013).

While my above efforts to remain reflexive and sensitive are not time or location bound, this regular reminder of the power relations involved while I conducted research was valuable. As a researcher from Canada, I always remain in an extremely privileged position. When I was there with my children, this protection was pronounced. If any of us had a medical emergency or if the area suddenly became unsafe, we were a phone call away from being airlifted away. When my children contracted malaria, we took them to a private hospital where we paid to have them tested and treated immediately.22 After a day in the field visiting the children in the project in their homes, I returned to my family's home, ate a good meal while my children complained that the power had been off all day so they were unable to play their video games.

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22 In 2016, Proscovia explained that children can wait all day at the public hospital for treatment and even be turned away if they arrive to lineup too late in the morning. The primary public hospital in Lacor, I was told, has increased its fees in recent years, forcing most people to go to the local Gulu Referral hospital where it is free to be seen by a doctor but patients are often sent to private clinics for tests and medication.
The juxtapositions were sometimes jarring and reminded me of my constant privilege to disengage from the realities of the poverty I encountered among the study’s participants. Furthermore, at any point, I knew we could leave and return to Canada.

Moving between spaces - from my family's Gulu house to the homes of the participants - allowed me to step back and reflect on the power relations. Our house was secured by a tall wall and barbed wire and located in the relatively safe and quiet neighbourhood of Gulu called 'Senior Quarters,' the area that historically housed the British colonial administrators (Amone, 2014). My children would often have playdates with American missionary children, whose presence (along with a constant flow of mostly American youth travelling to Gulu each year) called to mind the historically imperial ideology and conversion efforts of Christian missionaries across Africa (Ranger, 1997; p'Bitek, 1986). Thus, I was reminded daily of the historical relations imbedded in my presence in Gulu.

The daily call out "Munno!" makes visible the imbalances between myself and the informants and their communities and reminds me of both my privileged position and my complicity in reproducing the divisions and inequalities of colonialism. Research, writes Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), "is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism" (p. 1). The collective memory of imperialism of the colonized is reified through the ways knowledge about the colonized has been collected and represented. The extraction and appropriation of knowledge, for example, as well as the dehumanizing intent of researchers, and the framing of indigenous people as objects of inquiry all imposed a hierarchy positioning Western knowledge as superior. Edward Said (2003) emphasizes that representations of Others are not "truth," only Western discursive constructs that perpetuate oppressive patterns of power. Helping me to situate myself further and more specifically in East Africa has been the works of
Acholi scholar Okot p'Bitek (1967; 1986), which are grounded in an anti-colonial African epistemology. p'Bitek explained African philosophy with the specific case of the Acholi people in northern Uganda. He challenges the fundamental Western ideology stemming back to Jean Jacques Rousseau who claimed, "Man is born free." Humans are never free, according to "African belief" (1986, p. 19). Rather, a person is always bound by their social relationships as mother, daughter, uncle, grandfather, and so on. Knowledge, in this relational context, is something that develops through experiences with each other - by participating in social life. This relational ontological assertion is fundamental to African philosophy generally and must, African scholars such as p'Bitek (1986) and Bagele Chilisa and Gaelebale Tsheko (2014) argue, inform the approach and methods of a decolonized research methodology. Since my research is located in Western academia, the works of Smith (1999), Said (1978), p'Bitek (1986) and others like them have reminded me to both orient myself toward the intellectual engagements that critique the continuities of colonial knowledge structures and practices, and develop a critical methodology that is open to local ways of knowing. In particular, this orientation led me to prioritize a child-centered methodology with a focus on their everyday lives.

How I conduct research, whose knowledge I present and how, and my interpersonal relationships in the field matter: "Equity... flows through actions and thoughts - it is marked by genuineness and sincerity" (Sefa Dei et al., 2004, p. xii). My power differential in my relationships in Gulu will never be balanced, but I believe that reciprocity is an ethical imperative: "Giving back does not only mean dissemination of findings; it means creating a relationship throughout the entirety of the research" (Kovach, 2010). I took care to build trust and strong, respectful relationships and have remained committed to the research project for over six years (at the time of this writing) by returning five times during which occasions I continued to build
trust in my relationships with participants and their mothers or guardians. In part as an effort
to give back, I have had my research assistant Aloyo Proscovia continue to organize and facil-
itate regular group meetings over the years, which have included some research activities (such
as drawing prompts) but have primarily served as peer support meetings. Having the research
activities also offer the benefits of peer support was an intended outcome of the research de-
sign, which was based on positive reports from formerly abducted women about their oppor-
tunities to come together and discuss their problems. The children have expressed the positive
role of these meetings in their lives. “This project makes people to live happily,” explained one
boy, “So at least it helps to forget the past.” Another child said,

[The project] helped me to change, to stop thinking too much about certain things and
also it has helped me in many other ways… It helped some of the thoughts to disappear
from my head because it brought me together with other friends. I can play with them,
we can also tell stories among ourselves.

Similarly, another wrote in his journal, “I am very happy today because me and Proscovia and
Beth and my friends we were so happy because we eat, we play, we discuss, we know our-
selves.” In the context of the chronic insecurity the children experience in their daily lives,
these meetings seem to provide some respite where they can speak openly about their identities
as children born into the LRA and enjoy a meal. The children report that they look forward to
the meetings, which have taken place at the end of each school term since the beginning of
2012.²³

²³ The meetings are funded by the sale of my artwork, which is often inspired by my reflections on the research
process. With their consent, some pieces have been collaborative in the sense that they included select poems and
images produced by the children. Other pieces are autoethnographic in which I reflect on my role in the research
process and in the children’s lives.
Children’s continued involvement with the study, for which I have been partnered with the grassroots organization called the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP), could be considered part of the significant involvement of NGOs and humanitarian assistance during the war and after, which perpetuated an economy largely dependent on foreign support (Branch 2008). While officially partnered with JRP, the meetings have had very little, if any, involvement from the organization since 2012. However, since I am a foreigner, their meetings are inevitably part of this system of foreign involvement in the lives of survivors. Nevertheless, this year (2017), they independently began the process of formally registering as a community-based organization in Gulu district. In their last meeting, they wrote a group constitution, which is a requirement for registration.

Dissemination is part of the process of reciprocity. One girl insisted: “You go out and you tell the people, you put for them what we have been saying here. You push for them to see, also.” In 2015, I wrote a 60-page report (Stewart, 2015) based on the research that was published by the small grassroots organization I was partnered with. The document focused on policy recommendations for the government of Uganda, the local government, and civil society organizations. The recommendations highlighted the need to reduce stigma against children born into the LRA, to address unmet justice needs, and for financial support to help the children and their mothers with healthcare, education, and skills training. After reviewing the report, one child commented approvingly, “The [report] is like our voice. It can help talk about us to the world.” Another added, “The [report] explains the truth about us and our struggles with our life.” Beyond report and this dissertation, I plan to further disseminate my findings as scholarly articles and as a book.
Conducting research with people living in poverty poses ethical dilemmas, and can trigger ‘knee-jerk’ responses (Clark-Kazak, 2013). There were times, for example, when Proscovia and I arrived at a home and the family had not eaten for one or two days. Once we visited a girl when she had been left home alone with her younger sister a few days prior because her mother had to go stay at the hospital with her other younger sibling who was having severe respiratory problems. Already they lived day to day, depending on the meagre income her mother made. Her mother had borrowed money to get to the hospital and the girl had been left with no money and no food. I subsequently brought her some beans, maize flour, and oil for cooking.

In 2011, I learned that one of the girls in the study was not safe living at home (I will go into details later in this dissertation). After discussing with Proscovia and colleagues at the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP), the organization I was partnered with, we secured a sponsorship for her to go away to boarding school and connected her with a counsellor with whom she worked with for a number of months. Also, her family was one who regularly experienced hunger, so I often brought beans and other basic foods when we visited. As I have also done with other children, I provided small funds to assist with some basic and urgent medical needs.

In her piece “Research as ‘Social Work’?”, Clark-Kazak (2013) highlights the ethical and methodological challenges she faced in conducting research with Congolese youth in Uganda with no access to formal social services. Like Clark-Kazak, I sometimes felt as though I was doing social work. She recognizes ethical problems of engaging in advocacy for the youth, including raising the expectations of the participant and interfering in their own relationships with organizations and services. This was the case in my experience. For example,
funding had run out at JRP to trace the unknown families of children born into the LRA, but Junior’s maternal family had not yet been found. It was clear to me that finding his maternal family was an important issue for Junior. During my visit in 2015, and with his permission, I offered to cover any costs incurred by one of JRP’s staff members who was involved in tracing. With the information she already had about his case, it sounded like it would be fairly straightforward and I was optimistic in the way I spoke to Junior about the progress. Unfortunately, the tracing stalled after being unable to locate a certain person who would have essential information. Pursuing the case further would have required a significant and undefined time investment by the JRP staff member who was unable to do so. My visit ended and I returned home, leaving Junior disappointed after having his hopes raised.

Encountering such situations, I was propelled to respond in the ways that I did based on my sense of the immediate urgency of the situation. Farhana Sultana (2007) argues that in such cases, universities' institutional ethics frameworks can conflict with "good practice in the field" (p. 383), which demands context-specific, relational, and politicized everyday actions. Research standards frown upon giving participants benefits beyond compensation for such things as travel and time. Expectations for ethical practice in the field, however, cannot be static across contexts, as Sultana (2007) suggests. Yet, while my actions seemed pragmatic and ethical at the time, my good intentions may have impacted my relationships with participants, as well as complicating consent, in subjective ways I cannot assess. Looking back at my field notes, I recognize that I also carried a sense of indebtedness to the participants for their involvement in the study from which I significantly benefit in academic, professional, and economic ways (Clark-Kazak, 2009). In studies with marginalized populations such as this one,
the researcher inevitably benefits more, “no matter how participatory the data collection,” explains Christina Clark-Kazak (2009, p. 136). As such, I may have fallen into the dynamic mentioned above of involving foreign support rather than supporting their capacities to find solutions. Short-term interventions, such as my charitable responses, warns Clark-Kazak (2013), can reinforce identification with disempowering identities such as ‘vulnerable’ or ‘victim’ and exacerbate donor-recipient type of relationships between the researcher and participants.

While I felt strongly at the time that it would have been unethical not to assist in some small way, such support should include capacity building to find solutions:

[I]n our view, it is unethical for researchers merely to document the difficulties of refugees and their causes without, whenever possible, offering in return some kind of reciprocal benefit that may assist them in dealing with these difficulties and, where possible, in working towards solutions. (MacKenzie et al. 2007, p. 310)

In many ways, however, this was done throughout the project through activities that encouraged reflexivity and self-awareness. Investing time and effort in relationships, writes Clark-Kazak (2013), offers opportunities for researchers to contribute to the participants’ wellbeing and longer-term goals without exacerbating the already significant power differentials.

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24 Performing (unintentionally) this role of social worker may also have encouraged the children and their mothers to present themselves as more vulnerable than they were, what Mats Utas (2005) refers to as ‘victimcy’. Our dual personal/research relationships illuminate the asymmetry of power and may have encouraged their own performances. I cannot know to what extent this affected the data. In 2011, I asked the girls to draw a body map. We traced the body of one of the girls on a large piece of paper. They were then instructed to draw on the body harms they saw done to other children born of war. My colleagues at JRP suggested I do this body map because they were concerned that some step fathers were sexually assaulting the girls. They thought that a body map may reveal some information about such incidents. Suggesting they draw harms done to other children born into the LRA was meant to remove fear of outing themselves as the victims of such abuses. The drawings were graphic (see images) and when the girls explained their drawings they giggled together and laughed. In 2016, I asked one of the girls about the body map. She told me she seemed to remember their drawings were funny exaggerations of what they thought I expected. These concerns were also involved in how I interpreted the data. The children’s vulnerability is obvious, but I had to question my subjective expectations about victims and vulnerability and whether I was interpreting the data through such a biases lens. Doing so led me to avoid using the body map as evidence of violence they witnessed or experienced.
1.3.1. As Mothers and Friends

Proscovia has developed close friendships with some of the mothers, since they live in the same area in Gulu town. I am in frequent contact with Proscovia, so I often hear news about these mothers. The voices of the mothers represent a fairly significant part of the data produced, and given the nature of the project, they often shared with me their difficult stories, private details, fears, and their deep faith in God and His will. When I was in Gulu for five months in 2011, I was there with my three children and partner. I was there as a mother and wife, which I believe enabled an initial sense of common ground. In 2013, I returned as a single woman, by then divorced and my children had remained in Canada, and there was again a sense of shared experience. Upon sharing the news of my divorce with one mother, she cried, expressing her sorrow for learning that I had to also go through a divorce as she had also recently done. Of course, our situations were vastly different and any actual commonality was far reaching, but the sense of sharing a significant life experience fostered at least an emotional familiarity. Discussing breastfeeding and disciplining challenges and other parental concerns and joys was common when I visited the mothers. Proscovia herself is a young single mother who in 2011 had very recently given birth to her second child, who she brought to home visits and workshops along with her toddler at times. This continued in 2014 when she had another infant and again in 2016 when her youngest was three years old. I encouraged this arrangement both to support her but also because children are so adored in the society that their presence often enabled a warm environment. Building trust and comfort amongst ourselves as mothers in these ways helped to underscore our common humanity and respect. In a sense, these identity markers - mother, wife, single mother - shaped the contours of the project, fostering a sense of shared experience and belonging. Nevertheless, I recognize that my sense of commonality may
be a privileged perspective and one that, for my benefit, masks the inequity inherent in this
dynamic. While feeling a sense of friendship with her young Congolese refugee participants,
Christina Clark-Kazak (2013) reflects that the power asymmetries resulting from their different
circumstances could not be ignored or overcome. Writing about how shared motherhood af-
fected the researcher-subject rapport, Brown et al. (2009) similarly suggest that shared experi-
ences of motherhood are “fictional” across significantly different living conditions. They add,
however, that the “language of motherhood” (p. 47) can nevertheless serve as “important ges-
tures of friendliness” (p. 47).

My involvement in the lives of the children and their families reached beyond the project,
which has posed a number of ethical and moral dilemmas over the years. The boundaries be-
tween research and friendship blurred quickly. As I write this, I am in almost daily contact
with a number of the children on social media. One morning in January 2017, for example, I
woke to a Facebook message from one of them, "Do U know What U Are My Rol Modal In
Life." In another message, a few days before, a boy explained to me that his mother had just
told him he has an older sister (same late father, different mother). He wrote telling me about
his excitement and longing to meet her. At almost midnight in Uganda a girl messaged me
from her hut in her mother's village, just wanting to say hello and to wish me good night (un-
aware of the time zone differences). Such friendly and daily contact poses some ethical chal-
lenges, such as revealing visual contrasts between our lives, which may increase their expec-
tations from me or fuel unrealistic fantasies about living as I do. Enabling such friendships also
leads to questions about how this changes my ethical responsibilities toward them, including
the protection of their identities (Ellis, 2007) and the boundaries of what constitutes research data versus communication as friends (de Laine, 2000).\(^{25}\)

My identity as mother also shapes my relationships with the children. This mother-child dynamic, while helpful in some ways, was also problematic. As one mother shared with me in 2014, her daughter told her that she sees me as her first mother and her actual mother as her second mother. The mother narrated this story in the context of emphasizing her and her daughter's gratitude for the committed support I have given them. In particular, this girl kept a private diary in which she wrote specifically to me, sharing her most private inner feelings, reflections, and experiences (yet she instructed me to use the diary as research data). This dynamic accentuates the complex and often problematic negotiation of my multiple positionalities and responsibilities in relation to the children and their mothers. It is possible that my role as mother influenced the attachment in our relationship - being mother may have informed my behaviour with her, or my identity as a mother may have encouraged her to feel attachment toward me. I recognize these ethical dilemmas and that I must sit in unease, knowing they are unresolvable. As an artist, I have used my medium of choice (acrylic painting) to visually express the discomfort I feel with regards to these and other ethical challenges that arose during and after my fieldwork (see Figures 44-48 in Appendix B for examples of these paintings).

### 1.4 Chapter Overview

Following this introduction, the dissertation first reviews the methodological approach I used for the study (Chapter Two), followed by a historical and context chapter (Chapter Three) that

\(^{25}\) Consent has been given for the use of any details or quotes from such communications in this dissertation.
deconstructs the socio-political forces at play shaping the children’s experiences of social exclusion. The first empirical chapter (Chapter Four) explores the stigmatization they experience and how place informs the local politics of belonging. Chapter Five examines how the children negotiate a partial belonging. Through the stories the children shared, Chapter Six explores their subjectivities and how they create a sense of self. The story of one boy in the study is used in Chapter Seven to illustrate how the local politics of belonging affect their lives. The concluding chapter reviews the findings of the study, emphasizing how the children’s sense of being denied belonging has roots in not only micro-level factors, but also in the Acholi sense of exclusion in a macro and historical politics of belonging. I raise questions for future research about the impact of the children’s identities on life stages and across generations, as well as thoughts about the contributions this dissertation makes toward the study of children born of war in other situations around the world.

In the next chapter, I present and justify the study’s methodology. To answer the research questions, the primary goal of the study was to explore the everyday experiences of the children from their perspectives. I locate the research within the social studies of childhood, which is an interdisciplinary field that recognizes childhood as a meaningful life stage, distinct from adulthood. Positioning the children in this way, the study is necessarily child-centered, meaning it privileges the children’s ways of knowing, which is different than adults’. The details of the study are explained and the children are introduced. The methods used aimed to illicit the children’s viewpoints while being relevant and sensitive to the children’s socio-cultural context. I explore the rationale for each method, how each was used, and the kind of knowledge they generated.
Chapter Three introduces Uganda as a young, militarized and masculine nation-state and argues that the state used gendered narratives of childhood and nationalism to legitimize the war and strengthen the power of the government at the expense of the Acholi and children born into the LRA. I first make the case for the prominence of the colonial gender structure of governance, which included a strong military force as the centre of command. New states, including Uganda, prioritized the military, while maintaining the patriarchal structural of colonial governance; the Ugandan state under Museveni, I suggest, inherited and used this militarized masculine system of control.

The chapter then moves to examining how the state used neoliberal narratives of children and development and a gendered nation-building discourse to present a benevolent leadership that masked the colonial structures of power that oppressed the Acholi. By infantilizing the Acholi, Museveni presented himself as the father of the nation protecting his children. I invoke Veena Das’ (2007) idea of the figure of the abducted woman and argue that the figure of the abducted Acholi girl became part of the state’s narrative to legitimize its governance and the war. This positioning of the figure of the abducted girl as a child and the future of the nation, vulnerable and needing to be rescued, provided no space in the national imagery for the children born to these girls in the LRA. Within the LRA, the abducted girl served as reproducers of the nation in the group’s nation-building project. This context, however, is the only place the children legitimately belonged and the legitimacy was not recognized outside of it. The Acholi, however, resisted. Locally, the figure of the abducted girl symbolized moral and cultural transgression. The discrimination by many toward formerly abducted women and girls and their children who represent the evidence of the transgressions, I argue can therefore be
seen as a response to the chronic insecurity and moral disorder caused by decades of armed conflict and displacement.

In Chapter Four, the focus shifts to the local and interpersonal power dynamics shaping the children’s everyday experiences in a context of postwar social reconstruction. I explore how the children experience their daily lives and why they experience it the way they do. The stigmatization of the children is situated within a micro-level politics of belonging, which reveals local notions of morality and responsibility with respect to the violence and suffering endured by the Acholi during the war and after. Reconstruction efforts involve place-making - the act of rendering spaces meaningful, or in this case, the act of re-making place so that new meaning is constructed in former places of violence and fear. In school, home/town, village, and church, the children encounter processes of place-making in which they represent symbols of the past. Their symbolism affects how they experience each place. The chapter concludes with a discussion about the dynamics of place-making as a local level politics of belonging.

The children employ a variety of strategies to negotiate the boundaries shaping their experiences of exclusion in order to navigate toward a better future. Chapter Five explores these strategies - forgetting, social passing, prayer, and claiming their rights - as acts of resistance. The children refuse to accept their marginal positions and instead they actively negotiate their social and cultural legitimacy and belonging. They attempt to move beyond the limitations of their identities and pasts as children ‘born in the bush’, yet their ability to sustainably occupy positions of belonging is constrained by political forces beyond their control.

Chapter Six is about how the children make sense of their experiences and how they create a sense of self in response. By examining the stories they tell (through narration, poetry, journal entries, and drawings) about who they are, where they come from, and who they wish
to be in the future, the children attempt to situate themselves within the social fabric of their families and communities. They often told stories about their (mostly) absent fathers to acknowledge their pasts and remember the good parts. The stories they tell about their mothers are loving and demonstrate a sense of indebtedness for her suffering. Their families and lost siblings also are part of who they are. In their dreams about who they wish to be in the future, they challenge the notions behind the stigmatization and present themselves as valuable and worthy members of their society.

In Chapter Seven, I present the story of one boy in the study, David, to bring together the findings of the previous empirical chapters. The story examines the many forces involved in shaping his everyday experiences. He negotiates the boundaries he faces and resists the beliefs about him that shape his experiences of exclusion. Through his attempt to navigate toward a better future, his story reveals the challenges they face and the difficulty in overcoming the forces that exclude them from belonging in their communities and from moving beyond their identities and pasts as children born into the LRA.

The concluding chapter reviews the ideas presented in this dissertation and summarizes the framework it presents. In a discussion about the insights pulled from the study, I connect the children’s everyday experiences to the politics of belonging at various scales and situate their lives within a continuum of gender-based violence. I suggest that the findings present in this dissertation demonstrates a relation between the limitations of the children’s negotiations to the ongoing lack of accountability and responsibility by the state to change the narrative that maintains the insecurity in the north and the resultant resistance to that insecurity. Extending this conceptual framework outward to children born of war in other contexts, I recommend
ways forward for research that situates the children’s voices and everyday experiences at the very centre.

1.5 Conclusion

The stories shared by 29 children born into the LRA reveal the difficult realities of living beyond the borders of social legitimacy with identities so closely connected to the horrors of the war. Using a conceptual framework of the politics of belonging, nation-building, and hegemonic masculinity, this dissertation aims to illuminate the forces involved in shaping their lives, how they experience their everyday, how they respond to and make sense of their experiences, and what larger processes explain their marginality. The research process involved many challenges and required constant reflexivity. As a longitudinal study, the line between researcher-subject was often blurred and increasingly so as the study progressed. I maneuvered and made research decisions carefully cognizant of my positionality as a white educated Western woman doing academic research in a postcolony. The knowledge produced throughout the process, as it is presenting in this dissertation, reveals the value and importance of doing research with children born of wartime sexual violence. With a focus on the everyday experiences of children born into the LRA, this study responds to the problematic absence in scholarship of perspectives from children born of war.

Children born of wartime sexual violence are socially marginalized, despite constituting a significant population worldwide. As a contribution to the small but growing body of work on children born of war, this dissertation offers an empirical look into how and why they experience exclusion. The children in this study, Proscovia, and myself collectively hope that this
research can inform a local, national, and international conversation about why the wellbeing of children born of war worldwide matters.

Childhood is a social and cultural construction and “[t]he way in which researchers perceive childhood and the status of children in society” explains sociologist Samantha Punch (2002), “influences how children and childhood is understood” (p. 321). The interdisciplinary field called the “social studies of childhood” (James et al., 1998) emerged in the late 1990s, which advocates for childhood studies to position children as autonomous individuals (Crivello, Camfield, & Woodhead, 1998; 2009; Fattore, Mason, & Watson, 2007). In this framework, childhood is regarded as a time of life that is a meaningful human experience with qualities distinct from adulthood, and children are considered to have the right to voice opinions and influence decisions about matters that impact their lives (Freeman & Mathison, 2009; Hart, 2008). In other words, children’s views are taken seriously and the focus is on “the child as ‘being’ rather than ‘becoming’” (Punch, 2003, p.5) - rather than representing children as adults-to-be, children are instead positioned as social actors in their own right and “thus participants in the shaping of social, political, cultural and economic structures” (Christensen & James, 2000, p. 4).

Deconstructing the essentialism that informs past research about children, the social studies of childhood suggest that methods peculiar to children are not necessary (Christensen & James, 2000; Mason & Hood, 2011). Indeed, the study informing this dissertation employed methods typically associated with adults, such as interviews and group discussions. Child-centered methods attend to children’s standpoints “from which social life often appears differently from how it looks from an adult perspective” (Prout, 2002, p. 68). Significantly, methods
should be appropriate with regard to the social and cultural context of the study. Selection of methods, for example, must consider the specific political and socio-cultural specifics of contexts influenced by political violence (Hart, 2006). In any research design involving children, significant ethical considerations are needed to mediate potential risks and to manage the hierarchy of power between the researcher (white Western adult) and the children (Christensen, 2004).

In this chapter, I situate the research for this dissertation within literature about child-centered research methodologies. The research for this study is accordingly child-centered to privilege the children’s ways of knowing. Also in this chapter, I introduce the children and other participants. I explain and attempt to justify my research decisions, acknowledging the many problems that arose and some that remain unresolved, as my relationships with the children continue. As a mixed-methods study, I provide the details of each technique employed and how it was used and what knowledge was produced by using it. Finally, I explain my process of analysis and take note of the limitations inherent in this study. Based in a location deeply affected by war and violence, this study challenges not only common representations of children as passive, but more specifically those representations of ‘war-affected children’ as objects of study and international concern (Christensen, 2004; Clark-Kazak, 2011; Hart, 2006; 2008). This was achieved by privileging the children’s knowledge, while remaining reflexive of my biases and the power relations inherent in my positionality.

**2.1 Methodology: Child-Centered**

that most research about children depoliticizes their lives and is often rooted in neo-colonial civilizing motivations. Vanessa Pupavac (2000) argues that "the discourse of child rights suggests that the plight of children in the Third World is due to the moral failings of their societies" (p. 6). To challenge such neo-colonial posturing in research, Hart (2006) suggests "situating this debate within its proper political and historical context, through empirical accounts of children's everyday lives amidst conditions shaped by both local and global forces" (p. 7).

Young Lives is a major international longitudinal project on child poverty aimed at challenging the Euro-centric and often simplistic notions about children as victims of poverty in the Global South. By placing children at the core of its qualitative research the project has revealed the children’s diversity, feelings, and aspirations (Crivello et al., 2009), as well as the actions and choices they can make to improve their own lives (Bourdillon & Boyden, 2014). Without dismissing the tremendous structural challenges they face, by focusing on how the children experience their everyday lives the children can be seen as key actors within broader social, economic, and political processes (Crivello et al., 2009).

Doing research with the children at the level of their everyday challenges assumptions based on particular notions of childhood and children in Africa as vulnerable and passive. Doing such research that recognizes their social agency and participation in social and political life, necessitates listening to them (Christensen, 2004). My curiosity about the lives of children born into the LRA originated from first hearing their mothers' stories about their struggles with stigma and poverty. The mothers wanted to raise awareness for their children's needs and

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rights. Those best informed about their problems, however, are the children themselves. I therefore approached this research on the basis that “children and young people are capable of providing expert testimony about their experiences” (Thomson, 2009, p. 1).

I used a mix of methods to explore the everyday relationships and interactions of the children. I drew primarily from participatory research (PR) to inform which methods to use and how. PR is rooted in emancipatory work with and by oppressed people in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2011) and challenges the historical colonizing practices or research and ownership of knowledge. This inquiry approach involves sharing ownership of the research, which helps to destabilize the boundaries between the researcher and the participants. Budd Hall writes that participatory research "fundamentally is about who has the right to speak, to analyze and to act" (Hall, 1992, p. 2), requiring that the researcher remain reflexive and aware of power relations at every stage. The goal was to establish respectful, meaningful relationships, facilitate knowledge production grounded in the everyday lived experiences of the children, and enable self-reflective inquiry and collaborative problem-solving.

The research design for this study is very much like that outlined by Crivello et al. (2009, p. 55) of the Young Lives project:
The Young Lives qualitative methodology may be characterised as:

• Qualitative and longitudinal
• Child-focused and participatory
• Multi-actor
• Flexible and reflexive
• Mixed- and multi-method
• Responsive to ethical issues

Some of the methods I used, however, were inspired by ethnography. This study is not an ethnography, but it does, however, draw from valuable ethnographic features that distinguish it from other qualitative methodologies. Living in Gulu with my family, for example, was influenced by the recognized value in ethnography of residing in the field because the most powerful forces “of social life are not always on the surface, and are not always easily discovered” (O’Reilly, 2008, p. 67-8). Other ethnographic-inspired methods I employed, included talking to local people about their experiences with the war and reconstruction process, spending time with the children at their homes, sharing family meals, visiting the mothers at home and other relatives. I also spent time discussing local and national politics and local sentiments about the government with journalists and anyone who cared to talk about such things. Finally, I spent a good deal of time observing and questioning, and later discussing and analyzing with my research assistant, Proscovia, who studied African Ethics and whose perspective is very much rooted in her Acholi culture.

2.2 'The Project'

I spent a total of eight months in Gulu town between 2011-2016, while my research assistant has lived there most of her life. The research was carried out by myself in collaboration with The Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP), with particular assistance and guidance from the organization's Gender Justice department. My supervisor Dr. Erin Baines has been working closely with JRP, and the Gender Justice department in particular, to document the stories of

27 The Gender Justice department at JRP works with war-affected women, and primarily with women who had been abducted by the LRA to document and advocate for their particular justice needs.
formerly abducted women who lived in captivity for between roughly 8-14 years, many of them mothers of children who were born into the LRA. My research assistant, Aloyo Proscovia, has been transcribing, interpreting, and facilitating the activities since 2011. To initiate the project, I first travelled to Uganda in 2011 to meet and speak with some of the mothers and JRP in order to get feedback and input about my plans for the project. I returned later in 2011 and resided in Gulu town with my three children and partner for five months. I returned for one month in 2013, one month in 2014, and one month in 2016. In between my visits, Proscovia organized and facilitated meetings with the children at the end of every school term.

There is a total of 16 girls and 13 boys in the project. Two of the original male participants dropped out, while two new boys joined in subsequent years. One girl dropped out of the project and three girls joined later. The children were all conceived and born in the bush between 1995-2002. They were approximately between the ages of two and nine when they transitioned out of the bush. Two of them did not return with either parent and now live with their legal guardians, but the rest of them live with their mothers. The fathers of nine girls and seven boys died in the bush, while the father of eight children remains at large. Three of the boys’ fathers are now UPDF soldiers. There are three pairs of full-siblings (same mother and father), and 11 participants have a half-sibling (shared mother or shared father) in the project. Four boys and seven girls were sponsored as of 2016, while four boys and four girls were not attending school at all and several others attended on and off, as their mothers could afford. Two mothers got university degrees after returning and one of those, along with one other mother were the only two mothers having full-time employment in 2016.

28Dr. Baines is also a co-founder of JRP.
29The ones born in 2002 joined the project in 2013 and 2014.
30For short biographies of each child, see Appendix A.
All activities until 2015 were conducted in gender-inclusive groups, meaning that the girls only met as a group with the other females in the study, while the boys met only with the other male participants. Beginning in 2016, they met as one group. The research methods included 15 full-day workshops for each group, which included participatory games, sports, dancing, drumming, group discussions, and a lot of drawing. Other methods included semi-structured interviews with the children early on followed by primarily open-ended interviews with the children, mothers, and key members of the community, personal journals, home visits, and participant observation throughout. This included talking to local people about their experiences with the war and the reconstruction process, spending time with the children at their homes, sharing family meals, visiting the mothers at home and other relatives. This combination of methods was intended to encourage creative and reflexive expression and to allow for local knowledge-based understanding and analysis. A more detailed explanation of the methods I chose and why will follow in subsequent pages.

I refer to the research as "the project." The term developed organically in the early part of the research process by the children, their mothers, Proscovia, and myself. The term invokes a sense of the research process as an entity that can be owned and controlled collaboratively. We (the children, mothers, Proscovia, and myself) all refer to it as "the project," and no other reference is needed to know what we are talking about. The sense of collective ownership of the project achieves the very thing sought by the children: belonging. The boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are clearly defined, based on their identities as children born into the LRA.

Over the years, the children have attributed their participation in the project with many positive outcomes in their lives, including friendships, life and social skills, joyful memories, and feeling safe and free to be open about their identities. As one boy explained in 2014, "The
project has done good things for my life. It changed my life. It made me stop to walk, to roam around endlessly... It has given us unity among us here, it has united us." Another child echoed a similar sentiment in 2014: "But now the project has made me know also some other new children, new friends now with who I meet whenever we have the project." As the children shared their experiences, either in planned discussions or in casual conversations over lunch during a workshop, they also learned from each other. One boy, Ian Anzo, explained in 2016, “And those things of identity there, it really helped me a lot. Yeah, that made me to also save my life from other people.” Through hearing about others' experiences with stigma, this boy learned the necessity of keeping his identity secret. The project, therefore, facilitated important peer-support among participants.

The participants were selected through a combination of sampling strategies. They were selected from a list of 76 potential participants (all loosely within a requested age range and living in Gulu town) that was compiled by a community leader at JRP, a formerly abducted woman and leader among groups of formerly abducted women across the Acholi sub-region. The initial list of 76 is representative of a snowball sampling of children identified by formerly-abducted women connected to the community leader through her advocacy and outreach work. She first used her own knowledge of children living in Gulu and then gathered information about other children from the women in her network. The list included children with fathers of all ranks, children who returned different years, and children who were born in reception centres as well as children who had lived among the LRA for the majority of their childhood. In retrospect, the list likely underrepresented children who returned unaccompanied.31 This would

31 Some of the issues reported to be common among the children who returned unaccompanied will be highlighted through Junior’s story. Unaccompanied children can face discrimination by their guardians and families (they are usually cared for by maternal relatives). This is in part due to a lack of resources so that the unaccompanied child is often considered the lowest priority. Stigma within the family also significantly impacts their lives.
have been due to the fact that many of such children were sent to live with extended families and were therefore not as likely to be connected to JRP or other mothers. Approximately 70% of participants were selected from this list through criterion sampling (age, residence location, and knowledge about their pasts). The other 30% of the participants were selected from this list by the JRP community leader through purposive sampling, based on her familiarity with their cases and representation of a spectrum of experiences. Because many of the mothers in Gulu trust this woman and JRP, I felt this was the preferred method of identifying children born into the LRA.

Ethics approval was acquired on the basis that knowledge would be produced only about the children’s daily lives, not their pasts. Positive and fun activities, including play in particular, were central to the research program and to minimize expected risk in terms of security and emotional distress. Participation was entirely voluntary and significant measures taken to ensure their privacy and confidentiality.

The process of acquiring consent involved two home visits with the mothers (or guardians). This first visit with the children’s mothers (or guardians) was preceded by a phone call by the JRP community leader who had compiled the list of potential participants. In this phone call, she loosely introduced the project and the purpose of our requested meeting and confirmed a location where the mother felt comfortable and safe to discuss the sensitive details of the research topic (always their home). The purpose of the initial visit was to introduce myself to the guardian, explain the project, and verify the child's age and place of residence, confirm the

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32 In hindsight, it was short sighted of me to not realize how present their pasts are in their everyday lives. This was mitigated by not prodding for further information about their pasts and encouraging them to share only what they were comfortable with.
child knew s/he was born into LRA captivity, and assess any potential conflicts of interest. It was explained that participation was entirely voluntary and the children and/or mothers were free to leave the project at any point. To avoid expectations and disappointments parents or guardians were informed there would be no material benefit gained from the child's participation. We hoped this would reduce the possibility that the child's age might be falsified, or the status of the child's awareness about the situation of their conception. While the mothers or guardians of all the participants guaranteed their children knew they were born into LRA captivity, during the course of the project we suspected that at least one of them did not.

At the beginning of each workshop and interview, the children were given details about the day's activities. They were also reminded they did not have to participate in any activity they did not want to, that everything shared was confidential and I would not share it with their parents or guardians, and that anything I disseminate would be unidentifiable to the best of my ability. I also stressed that they were free to end their participation in the project at any time.

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33By conflict of interest, I mean primarily a concern by parents/guardians with regards to their relationship with JRP and/or the JRP community leader. There was a potential risk that a child or parent/guardian might feel pressured to participate. To mediate this, in all first meetings with a parent/guardian and child, I assured them that there would be no impact to their relationship with JRP, or any of its staff or volunteers. I also assured them that none of the information shared in the project would be shared beyond myself and Proscovia and only disseminated unidentifiably. I showed them where this was stated on the consent form, thus being part of our agreement. To the children, I assured them that no aspect of their participation would be shared with their parent(s) or guardian and all information would remain confidential.

34Proscovia and I later suspected that some mothers may have hoped the project would help their children know the truth about their identities, even though they thought their child probably already knew. In my discussions with JRP, I learned that for some mothers, telling their children the truth is painful and even potentially traumatic for them. I will discuss this more at length in subsequent chapters.

35The child was a very quiet participant. During the first workshop, my research assistant and I began to suspect that she may not know she was from the bush. We avoided group discussions that would require the girls to identify specifically as children born into the LRA. The topic was discussed in the group in a general way. During the girl's interview, we did not ask questions about her identity or the circumstances of her conception. We did not challenge her when, during her interview, she showed us her journal in which she had written her father's name as she had once seen it on her baptism card. According to her mother, the name was fabricated so she could be baptized. Now that she is older, she has become more confident and told us in 2014 that while her mother had never told her she was from the bush, she had in fact known long before the project began. Apparently, she pieced together the bullet wounds on her mother's legs with conversations she overheard between her mother and other formerly abducted women.
with no questions asked. Finally, we reviewed the importance of confidentiality as a group. Given that all the children understand the risks involved in divulging their identities, they agreed and kept private the identities of the other participants and the knowledge that was shared during activities. Although the children’s consent was not necessary since it was provided by their mothers or guardians, each child provided their signature as consent to participate to the extent they wished. To protect their identities, all activities were conducted in private settings and each child received a code and all data was recorded using those codes. Most discussions and interviews were recorded then later transcribed. In 2014 and 2016, the children provided me with a pseudonym of their choice to use in this dissertation and any other published materials.

2.3 Methods

2.3.1. Play

Play was central to establishing rapport, building trust and providing a source of reciprocity. To help put us all at ease, each workshop began with several playful activities. Such games were also used to help us all learn each other's names in the first meetings. In one such game we stood in a circle and tossed a ball to each other, saying the receiver's name as we threw. Recognizing the popularity of football (soccer) among the participants, I always had a couple footballs for the children to play with before, during, and after research activities (see Figures 2, 4). After lunch, the children played more football. Before continuing activities meant to

36Scholarship points to using sport, in particular, for development and peacebuilding (Darnell, 2010; Högland & Sundberg, 2008; Sugden, 2006) and in 2003, the UN passed a resolution called "Sport as a means to promote education, health, development and peace" (Darnell, 2010, p. 11). In a study about the role of football, for example, in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs in Sierra Leone, the author found the sport played a notable role in (re)building trust and relations and provided a temporary relief from psychological stress and trauma (Dyck, 2011).
generate data during the workshops, lunch was followed first by football and then another
game or fun activity, such as a three-legged race (see Figure 3), or "telephone". The children
in this project unanimously reported that play and food were the best parts of workshop days.
One child, for example, reported, "[The project] brought me together with other friends. I can
play with them, we can also tell stories among ourselves."
Figure 2 Football break between activities, 2011.

Figure 3 Three-legged race, 2011.
Figure 4 "What does peace mean to you?" This drawing by The Rock reflects the significance of play as a positive force in his life.

2.3.2 Drawing

Drawing was used as a method for knowledge production, but only when accompanied by other methods such as verbal explanations and participant observation. The aim was to capture the children's everyday activities, interactions, and socio-spatial environments. Drawings are constructed within specific socio-cultural and temporal settings. The reliability, validity, and truthfulness of drawings as representations can be difficult to ascertain, if at all (Thomson, 2008). However, images can communicate in different ways than words and have the potential for children to express their experiences, beliefs, and emotions in ways that speech might hinder (Leitch & Mitchell, 2007). Children also tend to find it easier to communicate without words, allowing them to “capture feelings and emotions through drawings and paintings [even]
while lacking an equally expressive written or spoken language” (Burke & Prosser, 2008, p. 414; Boyden & Ennew, 1997).

The drawings not only informed the study with practical details about the children's lives, but they also communicated nuanced aspects about themselves, their lives, and also about their role as research participants in ways that they may not have been comfortable or even able to aptly express verbally. Drawing thus allowed the children to make visible the forces in their lives so that I could then situate them within broader socio-political contexts. Gillian Rose (2001) refers to the production of images in her research as "critical visual methodology," which applies to how drawing was used in this study for knowledge production. She defines
this approach as one "that thinks about the visual in terms of the cultural significance, social practices and power relations in which it is embedded; and that means thinking about the power relations that produce, are articulated through, and can be challenged by, ways of seeing and imagine" (p. 3). The drawings the children produced at times, for example, represented power relations both in their everyday lives (see Figure 6) and within the project. In several instances, the children drew me into their images (see Figures 7-9)\(^3\), reminding me that the knowledge produced in the project occurred within the political, social, physical, and institutional space created by the research process (Sultana, 2007) and cannot be separated from that context.

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\(^3\) The example was a response to the prompt, “Draw a time in your life when you felt like you were part of a family.” This activity was preceded by a discussion in response to the question, “What does family mean to you?” Proscovia and I were careful not to provide examples, so the children could answer on their own terms. The answers were diverse, but most involved one or both parents. The drawing prompt was qualified by this discussion about the subjective meanings of family and I encouraged them to draw with their own ideas of family in mind. Given my presence as a Westerner, it is possible the children’s drawings reflect their assumptions about what I was looking for, although the drawings were diverse like the preceding discussion.
Figure 6 "Draw a time in your life when you felt like part of a family - past, present, or future."
The girl drew herself, her siblings, and her mother sitting at a table with myself and my children in Canada in the future.

Figure 7 "Draw the most important people in your life."
A few years later, the same girl as Figure 10 drew herself, her mother, my PhD supervisor, and myself.
A number of logistical reasons made drawing a valuable method for the project. It requires minimal materials all able people can draw. Proscovia and I stressed that the quality of their drawings was not important in order to relieve some concerns of inadequacy, assuming they have not had much practice - blank paper and writing utensils are not a common commodity in the children's lives. Varying levels of literacy made writing an unreliable method, but everyone could draw.

The producer of each drawing was asked to describe and interpret their drawing. Their interpretation of their drawing was central to the collaborative meaning-making, giving the participant ownership and agency, which is a necessary tenant of postcolonial theory. Taking
Figure 9 "Draw a time in your life when you felt like part of a family - past, present, or future," by Junior.

their interpretations, I chose to further analyze the drawings as texts for a more contextualized understanding. After all, each drawing was produced by an individual in a particular space and time. An example of this textual analysis in addition to the verbal explanation of the drawing, is Junior's drawing in response to the prompt: "Draw a time in your life when you felt like part of a family - past, present, or future." Junior, a boy who lost both parents in the bush and had been passed around without much care, explained that he had drawn a safari trip that his uncle and his family recently took him on (see Figure 9). The trip, however, I learned was fictional. On the top of the paper he wrote in very large lettering "P6," to signify that he was in the primary 6 level at school. In fact, Junior was not in school and he had not yet completed P3. As I got to know him better, I revisited the drawing and recognized it as a desire to belong both among his peers and in his family (see also Figure 15). I will discuss this further in subsequent chapters.
2.3.3 Journals

At the second workshop in 2011, I gave each child a pen and journal and instructed them to do whatever they wanted with it - draw in it, write in it, or leave it blank. I told them that two months later each of them would review their journal privately with me and Proscovia, I would photograph it, and then they could keep it. I hoped to capture glimpses into the children's everyday lives - their activities, interactions, interests, and thoughts. The children wrote and drew in their journals without recording dates and the sequence and regularity of entries in many of them appear to be random, based on missed pages, upside down drawings, and what they told me in the interviews. A few of the children addressed me directly in their journals, but the audience for most of them was not clearly defined by their entries. Examples of pages, include a drawing of a scene in a Nigerian movie they saw through the cracks of a movie house, drawings of their family eating food, written statements about school life, and written messages addressed directly to me.

Some researchers (Bryman, 2015; Elliot, 1997; Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977) suggest two ways 'diaries' can be used for producing knowledge in research: the diary as a method of data collection (qualitative or quantitative and sometimes supplemented by a "diary-interview" (Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977, p. 479)), or the diary as a document (used spontaneously without direction and/or not initiated by the researcher). Others categorize their use in research.

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38While qualitative methods scholarship uses the term 'diary', I will subsequently use the term 'journal' because that is the term we used in the project.
39This does not include diaries written by the researcher as field notes or research activity logs.
as either structured or unstructured diaries (Valimaki et al., 2007; Radcliffe, 2013; Morrison, 2012), referring to whether the researcher has specified the information they want to be recorded. I used the journals as a participatory method and thus unstructured, giving them ownership of the journals’ contents, but with a dialogue about them so the children could provide the necessary context. These conversations were critical to my analysis of the journals as documents and I used narrative and textual analyses to understand them. For example, three children drew violent memories from their time in the bush and several others drew similar violent images. Through the interviews, however, I was able to distinguish between those that were memories from the war, and those that were representations of images from movies they had seen. The journals provide unique glimpses of the everyday lives and thoughts of the children and have helped to both situate their experiences within broader socio-political contexts and provide the children with opportunities to share narratives about themselves (see Figures 10-15).
Figure 10 A poignant journal entry by Junior.
He witnessed both his parents being killed in a battle before the UPDF took him to GUSCO. He drew this because he loves them, he told me.
Figure 11 Journal entry. One of three pages in a girl’s journal listing things she likes or loves.
Figure 12 Journal entry. Drawings from movies.

Figure 13 Journal entry, "I am washing clothes"
Figure 14 Journal entry. A residential hut, chicken coop.

Figure 15 Boy's journal entry depicting scenes from a bar and/or movie.
2.3.4 Interviews

The primary interviews with the children were conducted in November and December 2011. In technical terms, they were semi-structured with open-ended questions and conducted in carefully selected small groups of two or three, or individually at a quiet location. The goal of these interviews was to expand on what each child had shared to date and to gain a more personalized sense of their everyday lives. Similar to the group discussions (see below), I sought to create a comfortable, respectful environment and used them also as an opportunity to build our relationships. The interviews were thus conducted as conversations in which I took very few notes, and allowed a good part of the dialogue to flow in whatever direction the child chose. Except for one boy and one girl, the children's responses to my questions in 2011 were usually short, which meant there were many opportunities for me to ask questions. For this reason, I consider them to have been semi-structured. Individual puzzle games and paper and coloured pencils were offered to each child for the duration of the interview as a means of releasing tension (Boyden & Ennew, 1997). Difficult questions about their pasts were avoided, unless the child raised the issue and we asked for clarification. We approached each interview with a strategy unique to the child, mindful of their age, history, personality, and observed sensitivity.

At the workshops in August 2014, I (with Proscovia's help) interviewed each child in attendance (a few were absent) individually. I had them explain their drawings and an unstructured interview followed. Four children were selected for in-depth open-ended interviews in 2014 based on my earlier assessments of how illustrative their experiences are for children

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40This changed as the children matured and our relationships developed more trust and familiarity. The children with whom I spoke in 2016, talked at great length without prompting.
born in the bush – two girls and two boys. When I visited in 2016, I conducted in-depth interviews with three boys and three girls. My selection in 2016 was dependent only on availability as I was unable to see most children since many were in boarding school. Each interview was recorded then transcribed by either Proscovia or myself.

In 2013, 2014, and 2016, I interviewed mothers of the children in their homes and without the children present. In 2013, I interviewed all except two of the mothers or guardians. The goal was to complete details about the children's lives, such as their date of birth, when they transitioned out of the war, who their father is and his rank, how they are received by their extended families, if they have any connection to their paternal families, and so on. I spent often many hours with each mother, listening. I used a list of essential questions (child's birth date, date of return, the child's health, hauntings, experiences with traditional methods of reconciliation, siblings, and so on), but otherwise the visit discussions were unstructured and open-ended. I took detailed notes during each visit and later documented them in my field notes. The following year I conducted long unstructured interviews of the majority of the mothers with the goal of getting a sense of changes in their lives and their children. In 2016, I interviewed a select number of mothers based on their availability and my need to verify information. These were two to four hour unstructured interviews, with only a few specific questions to fill in information gaps I had identified in the data. Interviews in 2014 and 2016 were recorded and transcribed by me.

In 2016, I interviewed key community contacts in Gulu, including two school head teachers, a police spokesperson, a Catholic religious leader who had been very involved in the peace

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41My trip was scheduled to coordinate with their usual end of second term holiday in August, but due to the national election in February 2016, the school year had begun late, shifting their holiday a month late. The children I interviewed were either not in school, or in boarding school in Gulu and could take some time away.
process during the war, a local journalist, a social worker, and a teacher and advocate for children born into the LRA. In 2013 and 2014, I spoke with a social worker who is very experienced with children born into the LRA. The goal for these community-based interviews was to get a sense of the broader narratives and concerns circulating in the community in which the children live. These interviews were unstructured, with only the topic of children born into the LRA as the guide. I held one final interview in 2016 with a youth who was born into the LRA but who was not part of the project (although he has half-siblings in the project). Two mothers insisted I speak with him and connected us because they believed he would have a valuable perspective.\textsuperscript{42} I had one unstructured interview (approximately two hours long) with him during which he openly and easily shared his experiences and insights with only a few guiding questions. I subsequently transcribed the interviews.

\textbf{2.3.5 Home Visits}

Inspired by ethnographic methods, I visited the children’s homes in 2011 and again in 2013, 2014, and 2016. The first home visit was with both the mother and child present, followed by a second one to confirm consent. The purpose of the first visit was to introduce myself and the project and review the consent letters, as well as to observe and collect some basic information. Some homes were visited again at other points during the field work in 2011, but not all. These were primarily social visits which provided a great deal of information as I observed and became familiar with the child's family environment, their living conditions, and relationships at home. They were free to ask me questions during these visits and get to know me better. All

\footnote{42In order to protect his identity, I cannot state why they believed this.}
these visits were documented in my field notes. Methodologically, the home visits represent part of my efforts to nurture a web of relationships with the goal of building a research environment that felt safe, respectful, and reciprocal (Chilisa & Tsheko, 2014).

In 2013, I visited the homes of each child while the children were not present. I conversed at length with the mothers and guardians during these visits. I took detailed notes and later documented them in my field notes. Then in 2014, I visited the homes of most of the children again while most of the children were not present. But when they were, I preferred to speak alone with her or him. These were unstructured conversations, usually consisting of a review of how the year has been for the child and their family, often lasting between one to three hours. In 2016, some mothers had moved out of Gulu town, making it difficult to visit them. I did, however, travel to two villages. One was where a boy now lived with his maternal family and another lived with her step father and his family.

2.3.6 Group Discussions

There were several group discussions during the workshops in 2011. A primary goal of discussing topics as a group was for the children to share and learn from each other, while data collection was secondary. The discussions were carefully situated within the workshops to flow with the natural ease of certain moments, such as during lunch or after a fun activity. I hoped to create opportunities for storytelling and to use as a participatory method that is culturally relevant. The Western interview method is critiqued for being individualistic (Chilisa, 2011; Viruru & Cannella, 2006), which contradicts African methods of sharing knowledge that "reflect the ideal of equality among participants and emphasize building relationships and connectedness among people and with the environment" (Chilisa & Tsheko, 2014, p. 223). Each
discussion was followed by activities intended to allow the children to recover emotionally if they found the topic difficult, which included games and relaxation activities. Questions asked included: What do people do if they find out you were born in the bush? How do you feel when that happens? How have you responded in the past when someone finds out? How do you keep your identity secret? For those not living with a parent or both parents, what do you tell people when they ask where your parent is? How do you feel when someone asks about your parent(s)? Why do you sometimes think about the past? How do you feel about your mothers? How do you feel about your fathers? What does ‘family’ mean to you? What will your future be like?

Longer and more direct discussions occurred in August 2013 and August 2014. As the children matured and trust was further established amongst ourselves, they were more free to tell their stories in response to my questions. The questions guiding these discussions included: Since the beginning of the project have you asked your mother about your past? What will your future be like? How might being born in the bush affect your future? How has it affected your life up to now? Do you think about the past less or more than in 2011, and why? Has the level of stigma changed since 2011? How do you feel about your mother? How do you feel about your fathers?

Also in 2013 and 2014, the siblings and half-siblings who share the same father (a top commander still at large) met together to discuss what it is like have a father who is a top commander. The purpose of these meetings was first and foremost to give the children the opportunity to be with each other, but also to talk openly with each about how their everyday lives are impacted or not by the identity of their father. In these meetings, the questions posed included: How do you feel about your father? Do you think about him? How do you feel when
you see or hear news about him? Is it important to keep your father's identity secret? How do you keep the secret? Have your relationships with each other changed since 2011? How and why? All discussions were recorded and later transcribed by myself. Unfortunately, there were no group discussions during my visit in 2016 because most of the children were in boarding school.

2.4 Analysis

All data collected, including my field notes and photos of the drawings and journals, was organized and then coded using ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis and research software. Throughout the research process, especially in 2011, Proscovia and I took note of patterns in the children's behaviour, discussions among themselves, patterns in their participation and what they produced, and changes and consistencies over time. Therefore, while I did not code the data in ATLAS.ti until 2014, the process of identifying patterns began much earlier. Patterns help us understand the children's "ways of living and working to render the world more comprehensible, predictable and tractable" (Saldana, 2015, p. 5).

Upon leaving Gulu in early 2012, I wrote a preliminary analysis based on these reflections. This early analysis guided how I began to organize the data. When I started coding with ATLAS.ti, however, new themes and more prominent themes emerged, while others became less significant. The issue of land inheritance (discussed in Chapter Three), for example, was of very little importance to the boys in 2011. By 2014, however, it had become one of their

43 Patterns of behaviour such as aggression, signs of anxiety, aloofness, low or high energy, natural abilities and preferences, and interactions with the other children.
most pressing concerns. In 2011, frequent beatings by parents, step fathers, and teachers was very distressing to the children. Three years later, beatings were barely a concern, only 'quarrelling' (arguing, yelling).

I coded the majority of the data in 2014. I coded subsequent new data in 2016. Coding helped organize and support the patterns Proscovia and I had identified, such as 'school fees', 'food/hunger', 'forgetting', and 'same/equality/rights'. As I coded, I often added analytic memos to clarify the code or to record an idea or reflection related to a particular bit of data, which offered new coding directions and possible avenues for analysis. Further analysis occurred during the writing of the 2015 report for JRP, based on the research (Stewart, 2015).

### 2.5 Conclusion

Jo Boyden (2003) laments the widely applied Eurocentric perception of children as incompetent, which undermines their agency:

> Interpretations of children as weak and incompetent tend to justify research based on adult opinions about children and policies and interventions that treat children as the objects of adult decisions, rather than social subjects with valid insights and perspectives of their own. (p. 18)

In this study, I have attempted to avoid such top-down analyses of the children. By employing a child-centered methodology, informed by participatory research, the children are positioned as active agents and competent survivors with valuable knowledge about themselves and the world around them.
The mix-method design of this study offered flexibility and also multiple means of producing knowledge. The longitudinal research process allowed for close relationships to develop (which brings its own problems, as discussed), between myself and the children and also between themselves. Careful attention was made to develop respect and trust - between all of us. Through visual, written, and verbal mediums, the 29 children who are part of 'the project' shared knowledge about their everyday lived experiences - often intimate, sometimes funny, and always meaningful - and I listened. I recognize my role in the production of knowledge, but have remained reflexive throughout in attempt to reduce the power of my biases and assumptions. First and foremost, in the research process, analysis, and writing of this dissertation, I have prioritized the voices of the children to make visible the meanings within their everyday lives.
The war between the Government of Uganda and the LRA lasted more than 20 years in Uganda before it shifted into neighbouring countries. Drawing on literature about the politics of belonging in the context of nation-building (Yuval-Davis, 1997; 2011), as well as scholarship about gender, war, and the nation (Enloe, 2014; Mayer, 2012; Sjoberg & Via, 2010; Cockburn, 2010; Nagel, 1998), this chapter presents a framework to understand how an entire population of children are excluded from belonging both nationally and locally. I analyze state discourse during the war in order to understand how the politicization of the sexuality of Acholi girls led to the exclusion of the children born into the LRA both as part of the national narrative about the war, and as embodiments of cultural transgressions locally. Thus, from both angles - the national and the local - the children represent unwanted evidence of social transgressions that interfere with the construction of order out of disorder.

I start with the nation-building project of the Ugandan state and show how it is highly gendered and why President Museveni had a vested interest in perpetuating and further establishing a gendered hierarchy along ethnic/regional divides. I explore how this gendering was an integral part of the war, constructed during it, driving it, and defining its violence. Significantly, the poverty forced upon the Acholi had an emasculating effect (Dolan, 2009).

In her chapter “The Figure of the Abducted Woman: Citizen as Sexed,” Veena Das (2007) explores the symbolic role of the figure of the abducted woman in the construction of the new Indian nation. During the war of Partition, tens of thousands of women were abducted from both sides and less than half were “recovered.” The figure of the abducted woman is
associated with imagery of social and sexual disorder, which is then employed by the state in its narrative of “recovery” so that, by re-establishing the authority of the husband/father and the ordered family, the state can be reinstated as a masculine space in which 'men' are in control and men bring order to chaos (36). The figure of the abducted woman represents how the sexual bodies of women can be used in nation-building projects. I draw on Das’ (2007) concept of the figure of the abducted woman and relate it to how the state used the figure of the abducted girl as one of its methods of nation-building. Using this imagery to their advantage, state discourses represented abducted girls as in need of protection, and reproduced the state as the father of the nation who would rescue her. In these narratives, girls were rescued and not presented as mothers but largely only as girls.\footnote{\textit{Child mother} is a term employed largely by NGOs, but rarely by the state. A child mother is a girl/woman who gave birth before she was 18 (Verma, 2012).} The children, therefore, had no place to exist legitimately in the national discourse. Locally, in the context of the social and moral disorder caused by war, the reproductive evidence of abducted girls was recognized as a cultural transgression – the children embodied the failure to protect the sexuality of its girls.

Charli Carpenter (2010) suggests that children born of wartime sexual violence are constructed in human rights discourse as objects of evidence of the harms done to their mothers. In a similar vein, I argue in this chapter that children born into LRA captivity are left out of both the national narrative of the war and the reweaving of the local social fabric because they represent the objects of evidence of the failures to protect the sexuality of Acholi girls.
3.1 Uganda as a Young Militarized, Masculine Nation

Uganda is a young nation, having only gained independence from Britain in 1962. Drawing on the works of Acholi scholar Okot p’Bitek (1986) and African feminist and postcolonial feminist theories (Oyewumi, 2015; Mama, 2001; Fanon, 1967; Enloe, 2014; McClintock, 1995), this section traces the colonial development of a gendered hierarchy that enabled a framework of elite authority and broad control. Post-independence nation-building exploited and further militarized this gendered framework of control. The leaders of Uganda did the same for personal, regional, or ethnic gains (Mamdani, 1996). Museveni was little different than his predecessors, using this framework to function as a military state. The hegemonic model of masculinity in the postcolony was militarized. Specifically, Museveni manipulated the militarized hegemonic model of masculinity to propagate a particular narrative about the war, in which the conflict became about control over the figure of the abducted girl. Ultimately, this framework contributed to the Acholi community’s difficulties in accepting children born in captivity and to the children experiencing a sense of unbelonging.

3.1.1 Gender and the Colony

The colonies were highly gendered from the very beginning of imperialism. The images constructed by Christopher Columbus in his journals feminize the lands he visited, referring to them as “virgin,” which in patriarchal narratives implies one that is uninhabited, “passively awaiting the thrusting, male insemination of history, language and reason” (McClintock, 1995,
Eroticizing the “virgin” lands, McClintock (1995) suggests, also implies territorial appropriation and the displacement of the colonized into spaces outside of “history proper,” the space relegated to women and children.

Symbolically, the colonial regime was perceived and referred to as a family, with the imperial nation as the father and the colonized as the immature children (Fanon, 1967). The western family trope, portrayed as natural and inevitable, became indispensable in the legitimation of social hierarchies in nations and empires - as though it were natural to any social grouping. Frantz Fanon (1967) argued that this fabricated hierarchy of the imperial family was merely a cultural projection onto a social landscape, causing those who were not of “normal families” to be considered abnormal, which was a form of social violence. McClintock (1995) suggests that colonialism imposed a “reinvention of patriarchy” (p. 17) upon the colonies, reflecting the acknowledgement that some forms of patriarchal values and practices pre-dated colonialism, but that these values and practices were “exploited and exacerbated by colonialists” (Enloe, 2014, p.118). Privileging its notions about gender, which are defined by patriarchy, Western scholarship has falsely assumed that most parts of Africa were also governed by patriarchal rule long before colonialism (Oyewumi, 2015; Mama, 2001).

The imperial family construct relegated the colonized - men, women, and children - to the space held for women and children, while the colonial powers represented the authoritative ‘father’ (Fanon, 1967). “A white man addressing a Negro,” wrote Fanon (1967, p. 19), “Be-

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45 This myth that patriarchy regulated gender relationships prior to colonialism has been widely dismissed by African historians and feminists. Nigerian feminist Oyeronke Oyewumi (2015), for example, argues that even gender itself is a Euro-American construct that is employed by (white) feminists who seek to subvert male dominance and yet is ironically rooted in the values and expectations of the Euro-American social model of a nuclear family.
haves exactly like an adult with a child.” Referring to his observations in Gabon before independence, Albert Schweitzer wrote, “The negro is a child, and with children nothing can be done without authority” (cited in Mamdani, 1996, p. 4). With the colonized treated like children, colonial power was held and maintained through this family-like structure. Recognizing the masculine power embodied by the colonialists, some African men became “complete replicas of the white man” (Fanon, 1967, p. 23) and then imposed assumed authority over other Africans around him. In much the same way, the colonies moved into nationhood with these same sanctioned institutionalized gender differentials where men, women and children had different access to resources and rights and in which the father of the nation authoritatively oversaw his wife (the nation) and children (his subjects) (McClintock, 1995).

3.1.2 Gender and Nationalism in the Postcolony

Colonial institutions, imbued with the gender hierarchy described above, were maintained through the political transition to independence (Mamdani, 2001). Mama and Okazawa-Rey (2008) reflect on postcolonial nations’ inheritance of a particularly militarized hegemonic masculinity and the many ways it was expressed as being a fundamental aspect of the new nations:

When victory came, and political transitions to African rule came, the institutions of state bore the marks of a patriarchal and militaristic history. Independent states promoted an ethos of restorative masculinity, and political culture in the new nations expressed authoritarian and militarist legacies, ritualised in the national parades of the Head of State and ‘his’ armed forces, echoed in the national symbols - flags and anthems that invariably have military origins. (Mama and Okazawa-Rey, 2008, p. 1)

Mamdani (1996) argues that Africanists, including Museveni, who were generally university educated men focused on ideas and issues as they pertained to independent Africa,
privilege(d) a Eurocentric approach to their nation-building. He suggested that instead of focusing on their own processes of becoming, Africanist debates focused on contemporary African reality as an analogy of the “transition to capitalism under seventeenth-century European absolutism or that under other Third Worlds experiences, or whether the postcolonial state in Africa should be labeled Bonapartist or absolutist” (Mamdani, 1996, p. 12).

With earlier reflections, writing in the 1970s and early 1980s, p'Bitek (1986) questioned the intentions of Africanists and post-colonial national leaders who sought to 'develop', as well as their allegiance to western political ideologies, such as “African Socialism, Humanism, Democracy, Human Rights” (p’Bitek, 1986, p. 68). For p'Bitek, the failure of African leaders to bring positive change in the lives of their people is rooted in this borrowing of ideas that grew out of specific (Western) histories of thought. None of these Western ideological terms, he noted, are “translatable, even literally,” (p’Bitek, 1986, p. 68) into African languages, making them irrelevant and meaningless to life for African people:

> Arising from definite historic situations and eras, mainly in Europe, coined by men who were locked in philosophical and social battles of their time, how is my mother and your uncle in Gulu and Kigezi, his grandmother in Machakos and their great-grandfather in Ife or Lagos, how could these foreign concepts form the philosophical foundation of essentially African states? (1987, p. 68)

Homi Bhabha (1997) calls such people as the African leaders p’Bitek refers to, “signifiers of colonial discourse” (p. 158) the “not quite/not white,” referring to their “mimicry” of colonial authority. Fanon (1967) similarly accused the colonized elite and intellectuals (who came to lead the post-colonial nations and nationalist movements), as having been “dusted over by colonial culture” (Fanon, 1967, p. 47) in their roles as intermediaries during colonialism and then as leaders in the postcolonies. In 1967, p'Bitek passionately took aim at the “mimicry”
(Bhabha, 1997) happening around the continent “whereby independence means the replacement of foreign rule by native dictatorship” (p. 42). He further explained,

This is not discrimination by white settlers against Africans, but discrimination against Africans by Africans, discrimination by the “black-suit” town tribesmen, discrimination by the educated men in power against their fellow men – their brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, against their own folk left in the villages (1967, p. 41).

Without being explicit, these interpretations of the new African leaders suggest they were working within a framework of western patriarchal power - the very same gender hierarchy that constructed the limitations of black Africans from political power in the colonies, in which the authority is the father figure.

3.1.3 Gender and the Militarization of the Postcolony

Feminist scholar of militarism Cynthia Enloe (1995) insists that militarization occurs through “the gendered workings of power” (p. 26). That is, it requires the mobilization of gender identities - “mobilizing practices of masculinization and heterosexualization” (Mohanty 2006a, p. 11). Enloe and other feminist scholars (Sjoberg & Via, 2010; Nagel, 1998; Mama & Okazawa-Rey, 2008; Cockburn, 2010) demonstrate common processes of inculcation of a model of hypermasculinity in militaries around the world.46 Given that colonialism and nationalism in Africa were structured through a gender hierarchy that is predicated on the power and authority of men over women and children, and more symbolically of masculinity over femininity, as I explained above, the institutionalization of a post-colonial militarized masculinity in the state is not surprising. In Uganda, as Chris Dolan (2002; 2009) argues, this mix of militarism and

46I refer to Angela Harris’ definition of hypermasculinity: “A masculinity in which the strictures against femininity and homosexuality are especially intense and in which physical strength and aggressiveness are paramount” (cited in Cahn, Aoláin, & Haynes, 2009, p. 104).
masculinity merged with other forces and grievances to drive the violence that brutalized the people in the north while legitimizing and fuelling the nation-building projects of both the NRM and the LRA.

Masculinities and femininities are sets of practices that “occur across space and over time and are taken up and enacted collectively by groups, communities, and societies” (Schippers, 2007, p. 86). Carried out over time and across space, the collective embodiment of the practices of a model of masculinity in a society make it hegemonic because it serves the interests of one group over the other - by structuring the distribution of resources and power, as well as producing meaning and value that assure and legitimize the ascendancy and dominance of men (Connell, 2000). More broadly, a hegemonic gender model provides a rationale for the structure of social organization at all levels, from the self to “global relations of domination” (Schippers, 2007, p. 91). In this sense, hegemonic masculinity in Ugandan national identities was not an anomaly but part of a wider, global enactment of practices that reinforce the hierarchical power dynamics rooted in the patriarchal colonialism. And while hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily violence-based, the necessary gendered power relations are most commonly sustained by invoking violence as a mechanism of hegemony. As Connell (2005) suggests:

Because the concept of hegemonic masculinity is based on practice that permits men’s collective dominance over women to continue, it is not surprising that in some contexts, hegemonic masculinity actually does refer to men’s engaging in toxic practices—including physical violence—that stabilize gender dominance in a particular setting” (p. 840).

In a context of militarized masculinity, violence is used to maintain and legitimize the power of the state through its military. In her discussion of gang rape during the Peruvian war, Kimberly Theidon (2007) concludes that militarization requires a form of hypermasculinity
that is constructed not only by rejecting any characteristics considered to be feminine, but by “scorning the feminine” (p. 472). Rape, she found, established hierarchies of power among soldiers and between armed groups and civilian populations. It facilitated this erasure of the feminine among those armed, while forcing the feminine upon the population, most notably emasculating men. Dolan (2002) also points to the close interrelation of gender and militarization. The hegemonic model of militarized masculinity, Dolan (2002) claims, is reinforced by the violence of armed conflict, but it also contributes to that violence. Going one step further to explain the role of the state, Dolan suggests that weak states such as Uganda make use of this normative model of masculinity as a way to control its armed forces and ultimately its civilians.

Ratele (2012) notes that in the context of Africa in particular, colonial aggression made violence unexceptional, whether direct and visible or quiet and indirect, referring here to the pervasive structural violence that existed in colonialism and continues across much of the continent. Thus, Ratele insists that poor and unjust economic, political, and cultural conditions, what Mbembe (1992) refers to as the “banality of power” (p. 1), can become resources for the reproduction of violent masculinities while causing the “collapse of alternative masculinities” (Dolan, 2002, p. 3). Mbembe’s concept implies the repeated everyday rules and formalities that are multiplied and become intrinsic in all systems of domination. Violence is a continuum and “includes assaults on the personhood, dignity, sense of worth or value” (Schepers-Hughes & Bourgeois, 2004, p. 1) of victims. Sometimes overt and public and other times ‘invisible’ and privately experienced (Peacock, 2012), violence is always mediated by a dichotomy between legitimate/illegitimate (Schepers-Hughes & Bourgeois, 2004). A militarized state will
claim to use legitimate violence, but the illegitimate ‘invisible’ structural violence is fundamental to the process of the militarization of masculinities across the continent.

The militarized state controls all levels of social organization, including its armed forces and civilians in ways that reinforce the power hierarchy modelled on colonial patriarchy. As the masculine aggressor, the Ugandan militarized state drew power from the structural violence that emasculated northern Uganda. The aggression exacerbated the ‘invisible’ violence while the state actively contributed to it in ways that legitimized the state narrative and power.

3.1.4 Uganda as a Militarized Postcolony

As political scientist Claude Welch observed in 1967, “Most of the trappings of the colonial period were simply carried over” (p. 309). With ‘instant militaries’ at independence, many used them to secure and force allegiance in the name of nation-building. The colonial regime in Uganda had established a strong force prior to independence in 1962 with the aim of crushing opposition to colonialism. A government report in 1954 read, “The highest priority is to be given to the strengthening of the Uganda Police Force” (cited in Mukherjee 1984, p. 248). Clayton and Mamdani (1985) link the colonial military apparatus to the post-independence militarization of the state: “[T]he repressive machinery of the state, in particular the army, the police, and the security services had been groomed and sustained by Britain” (Clayton & Mamdani, 1985, p. 28). These legacies, A. Kasozi (1994) writes, facilitated the instability in which “political violence, carried out by the military, the police, and other agents of state, became an accepted means of attaining political goals and resolving internal political conflict”
(Kasozi, 1994, p. 12); a process that Fanon likely would have called “a politics of substitution” (McClintock, 1995, p. 362).⁴⁷

British control laid the foundations for significant political cleavage through its divide and rule policy that identified the northern Acholi as preferable for police and military service and the southern Bagandan for economic development (Christopher, 1988). In his damning assessment of British rule in Uganda first published in 1956, Ramkrishna Mukherjee (1985) wrote that the British favoured the Bagandan (southern) elite, and both the British and Baganda elites regarded the Acholi as “marginal and inferior” (Atkinson, 1994, p. 5). The Bagandan commonly teased the Acholi as “primitive” (Mukherjee, 1985; Finnström, 2008). The Acholi role in the colonial economy, therefore, was providing police and military recruits for the more developed south (Atkinson 1994). Colonial and missionary literature identified the Acholi as a “fighting race” with “warlike instincts” (cited in Finnström, 2008, p. 61), which carried into post-colonial writings in which they have been described as a “military ethnocracy” (cited in Amone, 2014, p. 72). Such stark political regional and ethnic divisions in which “the extremely privileged position of Buganda and, to a lesser degree of the south in general” (Atkinson, 1994, p. 8) set the stage for a volatile independence. In particular, Dolan (2009) suggests that assumptions about the military-prone and primitive nature of the Acholi narrowed the terms of masculinity in Acholiland - a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy.

The history of divisive, authoritarian military use by post-independence leaders in Uganda began with the first president of Uganda, Milton Obote – a Langi from the Lango sub-region just south of the Acholi sub-region.⁴⁸ As Mbembe (1992) explains in his examination of

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⁴⁷A politics of substitution is explained by Homi Bhabha (Fanon, 1986, p. xxviii) as, “The fantasy of the native is precisely to occupy the master’s place.”

⁴⁸The Lango sub-region is officially part of the Northern Region of Uganda.
of power in the postcolony, “State power was embodied in a single person” (p. 7); this was
certainly the experience in independent Uganda.

The election of the first president was predicated on a weak and volatile alliance with the
southern Buganda kingdom (Adyanga, 2011; Omara-Otunnu, 1987). Obote consequently grew
the nation's military force during his presidency from 700 troops at independence to 9,000 by
the time of the coup that brought Amin to power (Branch, 2010; Omara-Otunnu, 1987). Sig-
ificantly, more than a third of these troops were Acholi, while Obote also filled the civil ser-
vice with northerners. Adam Branch (2010) notes that this patronage to northerners strength-
ened a north-south political divide and fuelled the subsequent southern political identity that
was central to Museveni\textsuperscript{49} coming to power.

Army and Air Force Chief of Staff Major-General Idi Amin who came from the West
Nile region in northwestern Uganda took power by military coup in 1971. Amin, who was
raised as an ethnic Lugbara,\textsuperscript{50} filled his government posts with soldiers, continuing this prior-
itization of the military in governing the nation. “[O]nce the military had been used as the
deciding factor in the struggle for power between two political opponents, it would no longer
be content to assume a low political profile,” reflects historian Amii Omara-Otunnu (1987, p.
77). Violence and terror at the hands of Amin and his army defined Amin’s presidency: hun-
dreds of thousands of Asians as well as political and middle class Ugandans, especially from

\textsuperscript{49}Museveni came from Moyo, located in the West Nile region in western Uganda (Amaza, 1998). Atkinson (2009)
explains that Museveni based his bush war movement against the second Obote regime in central Uganda in the
‘Luwero triangle’, which was home to a mix of ethnic identities and occupations, including immigrant farmers
mostly from Buganda. Museveni “de-ethnicized” local politics and emphasized a common Bantu identity, ac-
cording to Atkinson (2009). The enemy was thus simply understood as not Bantu (northerners). This politicized
the movement as a regional south versus north conflict.

\textsuperscript{50} Amin was raised by his mother and her Lugbara family. His father, a Kakwa, abandoned them when he was
young.
the south, were forced to flee, while an estimated 300,000 civilians were killed (New York Times, August 17 2003).

Amin was then overthrown by force in 1979, led by the Tanzanian Defence Forces and roughly 200 Ugandan exiles (UNLF), which included Museveni. The military continued to play a significant role in the new government in the tumultuous year that followed: the provisional president, a Baganda called Professor Yusuf Lule, held the post for just two months before the UNLF replaced him with another Bagandan, Godfrey Binaisa (Ochola, 2006). After 11 months as president, Binaisa was ousted by a “military clique” (The Guardian, October 3 2010) that included Museveni. Obote returned to power in 1980 by way of election in which Museveni was a registered candidate. Once elected, Obote again favoured northerners for the military. Museveni led the guerrilla force, National Resistance Movement/Army (NRM/A), in its opposition to the government. Meanwhile, the Acholi in the state military (UNLA) turned against Obote, resulting in a coup in 1985 by the head of the army, General Tito Okello (an Acholi) and Brigadier Bajilio Okello (also Acholi), and Acholi soldiers from the UNLA. Early the following year the NRM/A seized state power from Okello and the Military Council with “substantial aid from international sources” (Omara-Otunnu, 1987, p. 161). Museveni appointed himself president and head of the army four days after they seized control of Kampala. The NRA (the military wing of the NRM) was given supreme political power, which was clearly stated in the NRM’s 1986 Proclamation of power:

10 (ii) The National Resistance Council shall seek the views of the National Resistance Army Council on all matters that the National Resistance Council considers important (Obote, 1999, p. 27).
As I outlined in preceding sections, postcolonies inherited the colonial framework of governance, which was based on the gender hierarchy of the western family construct. Some scholars make the case that independence was not only a continuation of colonial institutions but also of colonial rule (Mamdani, 1996; Adyanga, 2011). Their works demonstrate that Uganda’s post-independence leaders were opportunistic elites who enabled the consolidation of British neo-colonial control. This view reinforces the intact presence of the imperial family model of control after independence with which a militarized Ugandan state exploited its control of the hegemonic model of masculinity to oppress the ‘other,’ or the colonized child. The above suggests that by the beginning of the LRA war, Uganda was a military state and thus framed within a hegemonic model of masculinity that sewed divisions, as well as a war over the ownership of the nation’s gender hierarchy and Acholi women and girls.

3.1.5 The Beginning of the ‘LRA War’

Violence, Ratele (2012) argues, has become a regular fixture of life across Africa, but it is far from an intrinsic cultural phenomenon: “[F]rom the moment of imperial ‘discoveries’ of the black world and colonial aggression against its people to the present, violence became unexceptional in many places in Africa” (p. 6). The history above reveals the transition from a divided colony to a militarized postcolony that reinforced the north-south cleavage and how the Acholi acquired the identity of a violent people. This history shaped what became known as the LRA war, enabling the “social torture” (Dolan, 2009) of the Acholi people. Dolan (2009) demonstrates how the whole society exhibited symptoms of torture as a result of enduring

51 Other regional tensions also increased after independence, such as between Idi Amin’s West Nile soldiers and the Acholi and Langi, as well as the Karamjong and Acholi (Dolan, 2009).
violent government policies and actions that abetted the perpetrated by the LRA and problematic entanglements and silences of humanitarian interventions.

Immediately after the NRA rebels captured Kampala, Acholi soldiers from the UNLA fled north and regrouped as the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA) to fight the NRA's efforts to control the north. At the same time the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) began under the leadership of a spirit medium, Alice Lakwena (Amony, 2015). Both the UPDA and HSM fought the NRA and in 1988 Lakwena fled to Kenya while the remnants of the UPDA and HSM joined and became the Lord's Resistance Army, led by Joseph Kony, a former UPDA fighter.

The NRA's counterinsurgency targeted the Acholi population, an arguably misguided conflation that the majority of the Acholi supported the LRA. A 1999 Amnesty International report described 1988 as a notably intense period of the war. During this early period, the NRA committed gross crimes against the Acholi population: forcible displacement of 100,000 people, stealing cattle, burning homes, raping men and women, and hundreds of extra judicial executions (Dolan, 2009; Doom & Vlassenroot, 1999; Lamwaka, 2014). At the same time, the LRA’s atrocities escalated (particularly the use of maiming and mutilation), while the economy of the north crumbled (Van Acker 2004). Around this time, the LRA secured assistance from the Sudanese government.

Both the LRA and NRA, targeted the Acholi civilians. The NRA counter-insurgency antagonized civilians - arresting and torturing them to coerce them to support the counter-insurgency. Local officials recommended forming small community defence groups. The LRA felt betrayed by many Acholi people and consequently ‘punished’ those it believed were collaborating with the government - killing and maiming (Allen & Vlassenroot, 2010). The LRA
soon began abducting Acholi children (mostly) and young people to fill their ranks, but also to build itself against what Kony sought the moral impurity of the Acholi (Baines, 2014). This was the early stages of the LRA’s nation-building project. Meanwhile, after the initial period of attacks on the civilian population, the NRA moved into a more supposedly protective role. Government and military tactics, however, simply became more insidious.

3.2 Narratives of the Ugandan State

Shortly after coming to power, Museveni launched into his nation-building project by embracing the international development programs. Uganda quickly became a favourite among Western donors and institutions, including the US and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). A Human Rights Watch report (1999) stated, for example, “The World Bank has been one of the strongest international supporters of President Museveni” (p. 151). Even earlier in 1996, a report sponsored by the Ugandan government referred to the president as “the darling of the western countries,” adding that Western sources see Uganda as “a success story of the structural adjustment programmes” of the IMF (Mugaju, 1996, p. 61). During a visit to Uganda in 1998, American President Bill Clinton referred to Museveni as one of the “new breed of African leaders” (Mail and Guardian, October 9 2015). Clinton’s statement echoed the vocabulary used to describe the exemplary leaders of the ‘African Renaissance’, a political and philosophical movement largely of the mid to late 1990s that aimed to overcome the social, economic, cultural, and political challenges facing African nations.

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52 Clinton’s characterization was a reference to the African Renaissance political movement on the continent.
Reflecting the most lucrative contemporary development narratives, Museveni drew attention to the state’s inclusion of women. This inclusion occurred both in the government with the implementation of the Uganda Council of Women and posting women to government positions, as well as in the economy by verbally supporting the economic integration of women: “[Women in Uganda] have been subjected to cultural norms, values and customs which are repugnant to the modern way of life… The good news for women in Uganda is that the politics of NRM during the last decade (1986-1996) have laid the foundation for the cultural emancipation of women” (Mugaju, 1996, p. 74).

Museveni’s regime has also drawn much attention to the wellbeing and rights of its children. It is a common refrain across the country that the children of Uganda are the nation’s future, which was reflected by the government insistence in 1997 that schools have the children regularly sing the national youth anthem: “… We are the pillars of tomorrow’s Uganda…” (Cheney, 2007, p. 122).

This section will explore the gendering of Museveni’s nation-building project and how children came to occupy a central role. I incorporate this discussion into one about the state’s use of such rhetoric to maintain the war and international donor income while the government’s actual expressions of power contradicted these fundamental elements of the national imagery that Museveni simultaneously presented. The state’s actual actions expressed the colonial patriarchal structure that treated the colonized, in this case the Acholi, as children under the violent authority of the figure of the head of household. However, Museveni used these narratives of gender and children to emphasize his status as the father of the nation. The actual practice of violent authority left the Acholi with no official voice, emasculated, and infused with a militarized hegemonic model of masculinity that upset the social harmony.
3.2.1 Female Bodies and the Nation

Feminist scholarship tells us that the nation is an inherently gendered construct. The state is masculine, exerting control over the feminine entity. The idea of a nation in the project of nation-building “typically has sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation, and masculinized hope” (Enloe, 2014, p. 93). McClintock (1995) suggests that men represent the builders and ruler, whereas women are symbolically the flesh, soil, mother, home, and culture of the nation. Reflecting this very sentiment, in his 1997 memoir Museveni referred to the nation as “this mother of ours” (p. 210). In her ethnography of the political identity of childhood in Uganda, Kristen Cheney (2007) references a Ugandan women’s national anthem that referred to women as hardworking mothers of the nation and “Mothers of baby Uganda” (p. 123). In nationalist discourse, women are expected to be the biological, cultural, and ideological reproducers and also responsible for demarcating ethnic or national boundaries (Yuval-Davis, 1992). Women entered the nationalist imaginary not as political subjects, but as mothers and wives. Uganda was no different.

By the time of the NRA/M’s coup, “Women in Development” (WID) had become common rhetoric in the field of international development and aid and by the end of the 1980s it was replaced with Gender and Development (GAD), followed by “gender mainstreaming” by the 1990s (Stewart, 2008). The UN Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace had just come to an end in 1985. As Museveni forged lucrative international alliances, he accepted and followed, at least on paper, the impulse of the mainstream international women’s movement to improve women's conditions.
From early on, Museveni aimed to present the image of Uganda as progressive in this regard, using women as symbols of the nation's progress and modernization. “The challenges of development,” Museveni stated in 1988, “Enjoin us to pay more than just lip service to the core issue of unequal gender relations in our society” (cited in Tamale, 1999, p. 2). Women’s issues were significantly attended to in the new constitution of 1995 and women could be found at all levels of government by the mid 1990s (Tamale, 1999). In a public show of Uganda’s liberal progress, vice president Speciosa Wandira Kazibwe welcomed first lady Hillary Clinton to Uganda in 1997 stating, “In Uganda everybody's a leader, which is why you are being addressed by a woman vice president” (Deseret News, April 3 1997). Clinton subsequently echoed the focus on females: “The single most important investment any nation can make for building a very prosperous, democratic future is in the education of girls and women” (Deseret News, April 3 1997). Later that year, the government adopted the National Gender Policy (NGP) as a key part of the national development plan (Tamale, 1999).

Aili Tripp (2012) examines the critical role of the women’s movement in Uganda and while there has been significant cooptation of the movement, she argues that its autonomy (relative to other African governments) has allowed women’s independent organizations (not associated to the NRM) to make notable gains since the mid-1980s. In other words, it is important to make clear that the NRM did not create the women’s movement in Uganda. The distinction is important so as not to lose sight of the tremendous work within the grassroots women’s movement. Tripp (2012) writes, the NRM regime has its own agenda and women are clearly part of this agenda. Support for women’s empowerment is seen as a way of building political support for the regime... [T]he women’s movement, in spite of pressures for cooptation, has taken advantage of the
political space afforded by the semi-authoritarian Museveni government, which has used women’s support for its own intents and purposes (p. 104).

In 1996, the state-sanctioned review “Uganda's Decade of Reforms: 1986-1996” stated, “The NRM has recognised the pivotal role that women play in the national development process” (Mugaju, 1996, p. 66). The concluding section of that review (called The Empowerment of Women) reported that women were expected to contribute toward development, but their most important role remained in the family: “Women must therefore take up the challenge to contribute to the modernisation and transformation of their country...” and then, “Equally important to mention, is that women leaders or activists must avoid extremism and reactive fundamentalism which may cause resistance from other sections of society… The strategy must avoid disruption and dislocation of cherished and fundamental institutions like the family on which the future survival of humankind depends” (p. 66). In her book on women in formal politics in Uganda, Sylvia Tamale (1999) echoes this insistence that women fundamentally belong in the private sphere, explaining that despite the affirmative action that significantly increased the number of women representatives, “women are still considered intruders in a preserve that was previously almost exclusively male” (p. 194).

Feminists writing about nationalism suggest that nation-building requires women to be reproducers of ideologies and citizens (Mayer, 2000; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Nagel, 1998; McClintock, 1995). The regional and international legitimacy of Uganda as an independent nation was determined through its development, which was (and arguably still is) evidenced in large part on women's bodies. The Ugandan government used “women” to portray modernization in Uganda with few actual gains that could be credited to the state. Government still expected women to maintain their social role and place in society, while it benefitted from the
accolades - for example, for allowing women to visibly occupy jobs in government. The female in Uganda, thus, embodied simultaneously the traditional and the modern, but still under the control of men who benefited from the national rhetoric that “guarantees women’s inferiority, for the favored members of the nation—the loyal sons—[who] must defend our women’s “purity,” as well as the “moral code” of the nation” (Mayer, 2000, p. 10).

3.2.2 Children, Development and the Nation

By the mid-1990s, the figure of the child became central to the nation's modernizing imagery. Historically in Africa, understandings of childhood did not mirror the same conceptual development as in the west in which modern discourses of childhood emerged from the rationality of the Enlightenment and the rise of nationalism (Cheney, 2007; Scheper-Hughes & Sargent, 1998; Ennew & Milne, 1989). p'Bitek (1986) explains that among the Acholi, a person is considered *dano adana*, a human being, only once they reach a certain level of physical and educational development. The 1989 UN Charter on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) sets out the specific rights for children universally (everyone under the age of 18), with consideration for their particular vulnerabilities and dependence that separate them from adults. In response to the cultural conflict over the western conceptualizations of children's rights, the Organization for African Unity (OAU) adopted its own African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Children (ACRWC), reflecting African values. In Uganda, The Children Act passed in the national legislature in 1997 and supported all the rights of children laid out in the UNCRC and ACRWC “with appropriate modifications to suit the circumstances in Uganda” (S.3, 4.c.).

53 (Children Act 1997) 4. Rights of the child. A child shall have the right—c. to exercise, in addition to all the rights stated in this Schedule and this Act, all the rights set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights
For Uganda as a nation whose leadership has firmly sided with ideas of western development discourse, the narrative of global rights for children was necessarily prominent. Museveni refers to development as the metamorphosis process of a butterfly or cockroach. In his memoir in the mid-1990s, he explained that “in its metamorphosis[,] society in Europe has gone through several stages in order to reach its present state, just as a butterfly or cockroach does… The problem with Africa is that not only has its society not metamorphosed, it has actually regressed.” He then states that to “bring about modernisation,” they (African leaders) must “monetize the whole economy… [to] undermine the subsistence existence of most Africans” (1997, p. 188). In order to modernize, he wrote, they needed “educated manpower… We must send all our children to school” (1997, p. 199-200). This economic focus underpinned Museveni’s argument for a “single party democracy” for the first 10 years of his presidency. He claimed that a one-party state was necessary to combat sectarian divisions in the country because political parties tend to favour ethnic or regional interests, rather than the interests of the nation as a whole. This effort to nationalize politics required the development of the economy, or in his words, it required “the crystallisation of socio-economic groups on which we can base healthy political parties” (Museveni, 1997, p. 195).

This authoritarian practice situated Museveni as “father-of-the-nation” (Okuku, 2002, p. 17). Some referred to this positioning as a thinly veiled elite monopoly of political power that favoured a collection of ethnic and religious groups to the exclusion of others under the power of a father figure. Prior to national elections in 2016, the NRM tweeted “True father of the nation” with photos of the president playing with two small children from Kamwenge. In 2015, of the Child and the Organisation for African Unity Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child with appropriate modifications to suit the circumstances in Uganda, that are not specifically mentioned in this Act.
Voice of the Movement\textsuperscript{54} “crowned” Museveni with the title 'Baba Ya Taifa' or 'Father of the Nation' in recognition for his liberation struggle and development and security efforts, a role it seems he has symbolically filled since first taking power in 1986 (Chimp Reports, April 18 2015).

Cheney (2007) has documented this focus on the children of Uganda as the nation’s future, as though the metamorphosing Museveni referred to is embodied in the nation's children. Based on her fieldwork carried out in 2000-2001, Cheney observed that children occupy a highly symbolic place in the nation-building narrative. As stated above, the education of children was seen as a fundamental means of achieving development, reflecting the state's faith in the IMF's Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) which called for broader investment in primary education as a means of fuelling economic growth (World Bank, 1991). As Museveni wrote in 2000, “By educating every child, we are investing in our children. By investing in children, we are empowering our people” (cited in Cheney, 2007, p. 51). The NRM recognized schools as crucial sites for social reproduction, and targeted primary school students “for assimilation into the national discourse” (Cheney, 2003, p. 80) promoting children’s collective identities as “the pillars of tomorrow’s Uganda” (Cheney, 2003, p. 80), a refrain in the national youth anthem.

Cheney notes, however, that much of such political will was still limited to rhetoric in 2000, much like the empowerment of women. Museveni introduced Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1997, for example, but in the words of Dolan (2002), “Universal Primary Education is by no means universal” (p. 70). All children are expected to present in western-

\textsuperscript{54}Voice of the Movement is an umbrella organization representing 50 NRA groups.
style school uniforms (just one of the many costly requirements to attend school), representing “the next generation of civilized people” (Moran, 2000, p. 120). Acknowledging children’s capacities to respond to their cooptation, Cheney (2003) describes how children used national festivals to highlight this gap between the nationalist rhetoric of children as symbols of a neoliberal future and the realities of their daily lives.

Nevertheless, largely through the imagery of children as the future of the nation, the state represents itself. By linking children with development, Museveni inscribed his western economic ideology onto children and childhood. This simultaneously positioned him as the father of the nation who would provide education and protection for his children, while leaving the children incapable of manifesting successful configurations of childhood. As I will explain next, Museveni’s rhetoric and how he actually used his power are two very distinct practices.

### 3.3 Gender and the LRA War

#### 3.3.1. Infantilizing the Acholi

In 1997, HRW reported that “Northern Uganda today faces an acute humanitarian crisis” (p. 53). Meanwhile, the NRM regime diluted the significance of the rebellion in the north for quite a while. Museveni’s memoir published the same year has no mention of the LRA or Kony in its index and only referred to the “Kony bandits,” or simply “bandits,” in the few references to the war in the north. “[T]he whole question of the 'northern problem' is overdramatised,” he wrote (1997, p. 213). The NRM-sponsored report with its forward authored by Museveni (mentioned above) mentions the LRA in passing just three times. For example, the report states, The difference between the pre and post-1986 periods is certainly remarkable in spite of the insurgency lingering on in Gulu and Kitgum districts. Fortunately, it seems even
this will soon be a part of our ugly past. In the spirit of national reconciliation, an amnesty was extended to the rebels by an act of parliament and many rebels took advantage of it and abandoned pointless rebellion. (Mugaju, 1996, p. 30)

The report continues by stating, “[O]ne thing is sure, there is no state inspired violence against anybody nor does the NRM tolerate it.” Similarly, Museveni was cited in the state-run newspaper downplaying what was referred to as the “policy of scorched earth,” which involved moving civilians from areas of rebel sanctuaries to camps in towns and make-shift camps, and then the burning their houses, granaries, and such to deny rebels food. Museveni denied such a policy: “There was no policy of scorched earth. There has never been such policy. What there was, was a policy to destroy food stocks that were assisting the rebels” (New Vision, June 27 1989).

Records of violence committed against the Acholi as though the entire population was responsible for the rebellion suggest that the NRM had a strategic plan to use violence to subdue the north from early on. A 1991 report by Amnesty International highlights the alleged abuses by NRA soldiers in the north, including extrajudicial execution, rape (male and female), beating and arbitrary arrest. Given the militarization of the state and Museveni’s position as the father of the nation, the violence carried out on the Acholi population in the first phase of the war and the forced displacement of most of the Acholi population as well as the government's stubborn insistence on a military resolution all suggest a certain desire to maintain the conflict at a certain level (potentially to continue receiving large sums of foreign aid). Further state goals have been considered, including to force nationalist ideas on the Acholi (who had been largely outside the national movement), and from a more psychoanalytic perspective, to humiliate the Acholi ultimately infantilizing them as a means of achieving national security.
Numerous times throughout the war, Museveni or his representatives were quoted as saying the war would be over in just a few more months or before the new year. For example in 1996, he was quoted saying “I give him about seven months, and he will either be killed, his group wiped out, or captured” (Agence France Press, March 19 1996). In a parliamentary address in April 1997, Museveni said, “[T]he remnants of Kony's group have broken into small groups that are being picked off one by one, or they are surrendering in droves” (HRW, 1997, p. 76). Other examples:

This is the last warning to Kony and his mentor, Bashir. We are going to crush them if they don't stop killing our people. We shall not allow these criminals to capture power in Uganda (New Vision, February 17 2001).

For his part, the army commander, Major General James Kazini, has camped in Gulu to oversee the operations and has publicly staked his career on the outcome of Operation Iron Fist. He told the press early in May: "You call me on December 31; if Kony is still alive I will resign." (African Rights, May 9 2002)

The Ugandan military says it is winning the war against the rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a rebel group which has abducted over 20,000 children.

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni has described the rebels as a "crushed force".

Claims that the rebels are on the verge of imminent defeat have been made in the past, but the LRA has continued to wreak havoc on the lives of civilians living in northern Uganda. (BBC News, October 22 2004)

Also, at the end of 2002 or early 2003, Museveni reportedly promised there would be peace by April 2003 (P’lajur, 2003).

55 Operation Iron Fist was an offensive campaign by the Ugandan military launched in March 2002 aimed at rooting out Kony and the LRA from their bases in southern Sudan (now South Sudan). The operation forced the LRA to keep moving, often in small groups, While the government claimed part of the objective was to free captive children, significant casualties were experienced, including casualties of children born into the LRA. Fighting, abductions, and displacement increased dramatically as the LRA moved back into northern Uganda in response.
Some suggest (Dolan, 2009; Doom & Vlassenroot, 1999), however, that Museveni may have been reluctant to completely end the war. In 1997, an all-Acholi parliamentary committee pleaded, “The people are of the view that the war should be brought to an end using a negotiated settlement between the rebels and the government” (USAID, 1997, p. 56). A 1997 USAID document reported that locals claimed a number of “elders were encountered and killed by UPDF soldiers as they were bathing in a nearby river. The motive of the killings in this account was presumably an effort by the army to prevent the resumption of the peace process” (p. 54). Such claims point to the level of fear the Acholi held toward their own president and national army who were expected to protect them.

Soldiers themselves may have financially benefited from the perpetuation of the war, but in his ethnography of Acholiland during the war, Finnström (2008) found his informants could explain the war in no other way than it being revenge against the Acholi for atrocities committed in the past (particularly in Luwero during the early 1980s, which involved the UNLA). Other sources (Tangri & Mwenda, 2010; Atkinson, 2009; Dolan, 2002) point to the financial benefits Museveni gained through international aid and reconstruction projects by selling the state’s simplistic narratives of the war and the LRA to the international community. Several scholars identify a fundamental contradiction in the flood of humanitarian assistance in the IDP camps, in which the aid supported the existence of the camps by fuelling a profitable humanitarian economy (Branch, 2008). Atkinson (2009) suggests, “These humanitarian organizations necessarily had to work with the government to provide assistance, they became increasingly suspect in the eyes of many. For at a very fundamental level, their activities supported, even made possible, the continuation of the camps” (p. 10). Lip service, rather than actual political will to end the war, characterized much of the state rhetoric of the time.
Chris Dolan (2005) likens the violence experienced by the Acholi civilian population at the hands of the UPDF (previously NRA) to incest, referring to the intimate level of the violation because the perpetrators are representatives of the father figure of the nation:

The violations perpetrated by the civilians’ supposed protectors are double violations, insofar as the act of violation, when perpetrated by a supposed protector, is also a violation of the duty to protect… In this respect, violations perpetrated by the state are akin to those perpetrated within a family. When rape is incestuous it can be more damaging to the victim than rape by a stranger, as the perpetrator is the very person whom the victim would usually turn to for support and solace. In incest there is no-one left to turn to. The victim is often dependent on the perpetrator and therefore in no position to report the perpetrator (even supposing someone were prepared to listen) (p. 230).

In such a framework, their only options were to be warriors or not men. Dolan suggests that the Acholi reputation, rooted in the colonial divide-and-rule regime in which northerners were most recruited for the military before 1986, portrayed the Acholi as inherently violent, primitive, and “war like” (Finnström, 2007, p. 81). Such ethnic stereotyping led to the perception that Acholi were collectively responsible for the violence and brutality of the second Obote regime. Conversely, southerners are perceived as more progressive, better educated, more integrated into the national economy. The colonial ethnic divisions were thus reinforced through the state’s enthusiastic adoption of the western development discourse on modernity and progress in a process described by postcolonial feminist Chandra Mohanty (2006) as “a civilizational narrative mobilized to create and recreate insiders and outsiders” (p. 11). Reflecting this othering by promoting a progressive discourse, Museveni referred to the Acholi in his 1997 memoir as unenlightened: “In the case of the Acholi area… the colonialists did the most damage by keeping the area backward” (Museveni, 1997, p. 211, 212). In the same way he

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56 This, however, was not entirely true because many Acholi veterans from World War II acquired high levels of education when they returned.
diverted responsibility by blaming the colonialists, he went on to paternalize the population by accusing them of being unmotivated and ungrateful for the government's efforts to develop the region:

The people have not been trained, except recently in our times, to know where wealth comes from. Many people in the north believed that wealth came from government service… The resentment in the north, therefore, is really due to the fact that our government made it categorically clear that we shall develop Uganda through agriculture, industrial production, or the growth of the services sector… Those people who were used to government handouts… feel completely lost now that the approach is totally different… In fact, if one looks at government expenditure on infrastructure, more attention has been paid to the north than to the south. (Museveni, 1997, p. 212-213)

A former child soldier in Museveni’s NRA explained that they were indoctrinated to believe negative things about the Acholi. She said they were told, “They are swarthy and red-eyed cannibals, killers, like animals and thieves with numbers and tattoos on their foreheads! They have killed your parents and once they find you, they will eat you all!” (Ochola, 2006, p. 33)

In 1997, a NRA commander in Gulu blamed the army’s reported violence on Acholi soldiers: “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” (HRW, 1997, p. 59).

These sweeping generalizations and accusations justified the strong military force used against the Acholi people, as though a violent father were disciplining his children, reminiscent of the patriarchal power structure used by colonialists to control the colonized. Dolan (2009) draws attention to the intimate level of the violence – violence enacted by the very figures (who were often local men recruited as Home Guards or soldiers) who were supposed to be protecting them - the idea of incest reflects exactly the lived experience of the contradiction earlier described between state rhetoric and the actual structure of power. That is, the state
rhetoric of Museveni being the father of the nation protecting his citizens and the actual structure of power in which he emulated much more closely a colonial authoritarian father humiliating, controlling, and punishing his children.

The lived experience of this contradiction stripped the masculinity of Acholi civilian men who became the victims of male violence and who became unable to protect their families. Dolan (2002) introduces the term “thwarting,” which means “the inability to sustain or properly take up a gendered subject position, resulting in a crisis, real or imagined, of self-representation and/or social evaluation” (2002, p. 9). Thwarting, Dolan suggests, is synonymous with loss of human dignity. Thus, within war-affected societies opportunities to achieve the hegemonic model of masculinity are extremely limited, and men lose their sense of dignity. This process in northern Uganda, Dolan argues, was politically manipulated. The militarized hegemonic model of masculinity encouraged the use of violence to undermine Acholi men’s sense of self as a means of control, including mass rape of men. Because the normative model of masculinity depends on femininity, the Acholi as a population were effectively emasculated, infantilized, and humiliated and targeted by their own rhetorical father.

This sense of incest and/or infantilization was further entrenched by the government’s forced displacement of much of the Acholi population into “protected villages” - internally displaced persons camps. The government claimed it was simultaneously protecting the Acholi from the LRA while also being suspicious of their involvement, suggesting that its sweeping accusations against the Acholi as a whole had yet to properly end. One critic against the protected villages felt that southerners believed that “they are having what they deserve. It's their turn now. When they have enough… they'll stop” (cited in Dolan, 2005, p. 161), again echoing the sense that the Acholi were being treated as misbehaving children. As the incest analogy
suggests, however, the violations against the population were more damaging than if they had come from an outside force because the government was claiming to be protecting the people at the same time it was enacting or enabling this violence. Dolan's idea of incest and the infantilizing attitude represented in Museveni's statements evokes the metaphor of the nation as a family.

3.3.2 Captive or Rebel?
In her analysis of the mass abduction of women from both sides during the Partition of India, Veena Das (2007) invokes the idea of the “abducted woman in the imaginary of the masculine nation” (p. 19). As outlined in Chapter One, Das suggests that the story of the abducted woman and its intrinsic relationship to patriarchy has implications for the state imagined as masculine. In other words, the gender relations inherent in the use and circulation of the image of the abducted woman and her rescue reproduces the gender power of the state. Below, I examine how the state employed a simplistic, depoliticized narrative of the war with the figure of the abducted girl as its central, mobilizing symbol.

The metaphor of the national family failed to represent the reality on the ground as Museveni and government representatives struggled to be clear about who was a perpetrator and who was an innocent civilian, and who was a rebel versus a child victim. This confusion about who was what challenged the state's image as being a progressive force about the protection of child rights. Government spokespeople nevertheless seemed to strategically interchange the labels to promote a “simplistic, black-and-white view of the war as essentially “good” (the Ugandan government and army, the US, the ICC) versus “evil” (the LRA)” (Atkinson, 2009, p. 10).
Contemporaneous newspaper articles shed light on the government narrative about the war. Using the AllAfrica.com database as my primary search engine, I looked up general terms such as LRA, rebels, Kony, captive/captivity, abduction, and bush. I also narrowed my search to specific terms, including Aboke, St Mary’s, Bantariza, parade, and CPA, among others. I was most interested in Ugandan news publications, but also considered and included European sources. Of particular interest to me was the different words used to describe similar or same situations in or about northern Uganda. By comparing multiple sources, the particular the narrative of the government became apparent.

A review of newspaper articles from the late 1990s and early 2000s suggest the government referred to captives as rebels if they had been killed by the UPDF, but referred to them as captives or abductees if they were rescued. In November 1998, for example, a UPDF commander told the local RDC that more than 14 “Kony rebels” were killed by UPDF soldiers, while 24 “children who were in captivity” were rescued (New Vision, November 27 1998). Earlier that year, the UPDF director of information and public relations Capt. Shaban Bantariza updated the media after a clash stating, “[T]wo rebels were killed, two guns with six magazines recovered and three captives rescued” (New Vision, July 22 1998).

The military deviated from this strategic labelling only to advertise itself as the masculine protector of the nation’s children by drawing attention to the abduction of children while simultaneously flaunting its military wins. At a 1998 rally in Kitgum, for example, organized by the (government appointed) Regional District Commissioner (RDC) and the UPDF, the army “paraded 74 LRA rebel captives” they had rescued the day before (The Monitor, June 5 1998).

57 The archive of Ugandan newspapers on AllAfrica.com began in 1997.
This practice of distinctly identifying those killed and those rescued continued through the war. Five years later in 2003, Lt Paddy Ankunda announced that the UPDF “killed four LRA rebels, captured one, and rescued 10 abductees in Gulu and Pader districts” (New Vision, October 19 2003).

Advocates drew attention to the reality on the ground of indiscriminate violence against abducted children. In 1998, a spokesperson for the Concerned Parents Association (CPA), an organization formed in 1996 by parents of abducted children to seek their release, accused the government of ineffective action and indiscriminate killings: “Who are the rebels? Our children whom you [UPDF] failed to protect and someone is pushing them to confront you” (The Monitor, October 12 1998). Earlier that year in June, officials of humanitarian organizations in the north met and agreed that the army must stop killing captives as though they were “rebels.” As the World Vision associate director put it, “About 99% of Kony fighters are children abducted from schools and villages. We should stop calling them rebels and the UPDF should spare them during confrontations” (New Vision, June 8 1998). Gulu MP Norbert Mao noted that the LRA usually send the children to the front of battles. “[I]f you go against the rebels militarily, you are causing the death of our children,” explained a concerned parent of an abducted child in 1997 (HRW, p. 78). Such frustrations with the government’s level of violence and apparent indiscriminate identification of who was and who was not a rebel continued throughout the war as Acholi civilians and leaders called for a negotiated settlement.

Such accusations of failure to protect children challenged Museveni’s self-portrayal as the father of the nation. A mother of an abducted girl and one of the original parents of CPA shamed the state for its failure to fulfill its role as protector of the nation’s children:
How many more years should we wait and how many lives will have been destroyed? Everybody is a native of this land and the government is the father. Are we saying we have failed to solve this problem, shall we continue for another decade like this? (The Monitor, October 12 1998)

Some, as previously mentioned, contend that Museveni allowed the war to go on to attract aid money and the support of international allies. Indeed, in 1999, 55% of the Ugandan budget came from the international community. An Acholi MP shared such thoughts in 1997:

The war in the north is being used as a financial conduit to fund other wars. The amount allegedly being spent on the war in the north is vast, and in ten years we see no results… And meanwhile, the Acholi die, and there is less money for social welfare and development all over (HRW, 1997, p. 80).

Museveni's public image as the father of the nation was at odds with the image he presented to the world – a leading example of structural adjustment, which had garnered him the dubious recognition as the World Bank's “star pupil” (HRW, 1999).

The government nevertheless pushed its simplistic narrative and the portrayal of the war as child-centered boosted the legitimacy of the state’s demonization of the LRA and its simplistic narrative of the war. A focus on the abductions by the LRA, Dolan (2002) argues, strategically distanced the NRM from its own historical use of child soldiers in the bush war in the early 1980s. Others argue that the focus on abductions depoliticized the war (Finnström, 2007; Atkinson, 2009).

3.3.3 The Figure of the Abducted Girl

The abductions of 139 school girls on October 10, 1996 from St. Mary's College triggered an outpouring of international attention, becoming the “cause célèbre” of child rights advocacy
groups (Dolan, 2002). The international attention was due in part from the grassroots campaigning by Concerned Parents Association (CPA), an organization initiated by parents of the abducted school girls to advocate for their safe return and that of abductees in general.

Finnström (2008) notes how the international rally behind the “Aboke girls” rested on the same one-sided narrative that depoliticized the LRA and the war. This one-sided international attention boded well for the government. Since abducted boys were more likely than girl abductees to become LRA fighters, the innocence of the abducted girls seems to have been a much more salient symbol for the government to exploit, as well as international advocates. In August 1996, 39 school boys were abducted from Sir Samuel Baker Secondary School in Gulu district and as of 2014 only 13 had ever returned (The Monitor, September 20 2014), yet there was barely a mention of them or other school boys abducted in the media.

The abductions from St. Mary’s College provided the state with a simple narrative that resonated with the international community and presented the Ugandan state as respectable and in line with western values because it shared the same outrage. Media reported a statement from Belgian State Secretary for Development Cooperation attached to the Prime Minister, Reginald Moreels, demonstrating the link between the abducted girls and international support, both in terms of state legitimacy and financial assistance:

Moreels said he will visit protected villages, humanitarian organisations and hold talks with district leaders. He said the issue of abducted Aboke girls is an international human rights concern. He said his visit is instrumental to Belgian assistance to the people in northern Uganda.

Finnström (2008) refers explicitly to the book and film by E. De Temmerman (2001) about the abductions from St. Mary’s College, which, he says, follows the widespread thesis that depicts Kony as the absolute ruler of the LRA driven solely by the Ten Commandments.
"We have several projects in the north as part of bilateral and multilateral projects. We are supporting efforts towards human rights, displaced persons and refugees," said Moreels.

He said Belgium has plans to open an embassy in Uganda because Uganda is a key player in the Great Lakes Region. "Belgium is committed to solving problems in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and I will visit southern Sudan next Thursday," he said. (The Monitor, June 9 1998)

From the moment of the abductions from St. Mary's College, I suggest, Museveni's narrative changed to focus on the recovery of vulnerable Acholi girls as a method of constructing order out of the seeming chaos that was the war and a way to bring his nation-building efforts back into focus. Ultimately, abducted girls became part of the national imagery as girls with their sexuality controlled and not as reproductive females or mothers of children born of sexual violence that the government failed to protect.

The sexual reproductive capacity of females has always been a central feature in projects of nation building. With the growing phenomenon in the LRA of forced marriages, the power struggle between the two symbolic heads of households, Museveni and Kony, became centered over the control of the girls' sexuality. In the LRA, the girls were mothers of the new Acholi nation. In Museveni's project, the girls were the daughters of the nation, to be protected and rescued by the father, which was the state, because Acholi men had become emasculated by losing their homes, livelihoods, and ability to protect and care for their families. A confluence of factors galvanized the Aboke abductions into the international news and presented Museveni with a posturing he seems to have used to his benefit in his narrative about the nation, the war, and himself as the leader of the nation. Hints of how this played out in the state's favour appeared shortly after, as the above article from the independent newspaper reported in 1998.
As the years passed, the state's focus on the rescue of abducted girls became increasingly apparent. In 1997, the military publicly celebrated the return of three of the girls:

During his interview with the paper, Kazini paraded three female students who had escaped from rebel captivity during the battle. The three were among of 150 girls abducted last October from St. Mary's College Aboke in Gulu, 360 kilometres (375 miles) [sic] north of the Ugandan capital. (Agence France Presse, January 6 1997)

In 2003, the state-owned newspaper The New Vision reported the recovery of girls recently abducted from a boarding school, depicting both the girls' appreciation for their rescue and their rescue as a state triumph worthy of a public rally:

The girls said they walked for more than 20 miles to a landing site in Bululu, from where they were transported across Lake Kyoga to Bugondo landing site in Kasilo, Soroti District. The girls, some of whom were limping from the trek, broke into tears when they were presented at a public rally organized by the state minister for health, Capt Mike Mukula, at Soroti Independence Square yesterday. (New Vision, June 26 2003)

In another New Vision article, the writer paints a picture of extremes. Readers are led to imagine the wonderment and gratitude of the recent returnees, while it also highlights the material success of the government. The implicit narrative is strong:

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59Similarly drawing on the vulnerability of the figure of the abducted girl, CPA successfully appealed to Pope John Paul II who raised international concern about their situation. CPA also met with Nelson Mandela, members of the EU parliament, Muammar Gadaffi, Sudan President Omar Bashir, and Robert Mugabe. Oprah Winfrey and US former First Lady Hillary Clinton also called for the release of the girls. Parallels have been drawn between the international concern for the release of the girls abducted from St Mary’s College in 1996 and the 276 girls abducted from their school in Chibok, Nigeria by Boko Haram in 2014. Survivors of the St. Mary’s College abductions, now members of WAN, recognized the parallels and made an emotional plea for their return. For details see: http://justiceandreconciliation.com/blog/2014/we-were-those-girls/

60Tripp (2012) outlines Museveni’s increasing control of the nation’s media. Shortly after Museveni came to power, Tripp (2012) says individual journalists and editors were targeted for harassment, censorship, and imprisonment. In 1995, the government passed The Press and Journalists Statute, which saw tight controls on journalist conduct and strict disciplinary measures: “The editor of The Crusader newspaper George Lugalambi, was arrested in November 1998 along with his reporter and New Vision’s Mbarara bureau chief, James Mujuni. They were charged with sedition for publishing articles criticizing Museveni and the NRM” (Tripp, 2012, p. 60). In the late 1980s, there were roughly 30 English newspapers and magazines. By the late 1990s, there were only two (Tripp, 2012).
Former LRA rebel fighters were on Sunday mesmerised by the glamour at the Speke Resort Beach at Munyonyo on the shores of Lake Victoria, Emmy Allio (a New Vision reporter) reports.

About 60 former fighters, many of them women, admired the scenery and golden rays of the setting sun. The women and children stared into the lake as if transfixed.

Among them were two former wives of Kony, with about a dozen babies born in captivity. All looked healthy and seemed to wonder at the sight of Kampala well-to-do who jammed the beach.

Earlier, the presence of the Kabaka (king) of Buganda, Ronald Mutebi, caused excitement among the revellers who flooded the beach. Uganda's Big Brother Africa house participant Gaetano had just been shown the exit, when the Kabaka appeared. Mutebi, escorted by an unarmed UPDF soldier, walked near the waters where a Whiteman was cruising on a speedboat.

Mutebi was clad in a leisure jacket and a red cap, with his right hand tucked in his trousers pocket. He walked briskly, snaking through the crowd. It was hard to recognise Mutebi because the cap covered his face.

The former fighters, accompanied by Lt. Col. Eric Otema, arrived in Kampala on Saturday. President Museveni was expected to parade them before Parliament and diplomats yesterday.

"We want them to know that whatever Kony and his supporters tell them about suffering in Uganda is not true," Otema, the 4th Division commander, said. The former fighters were booked into Fairway Hotel. "Kampala is very beautiful," one said. (New Vision, September 9 2003)

The imagery of the abducted girl as innocent, victim, vulnerable, and desexualized, makes her image socially acceptable and thus available to the “political instrumentality of the nation” (Mookherjee, 2008, p. 49). The emphasis on the figure of the abducted girl both as vulnerable and deserving of an education locates the girls within the development discourses on “gender” and children's rights, both central to the state's image as a modern nation. The act
of rescuing the girls within the context of their imagery highlighted the state's commitment to 'development' and its 'progressive' ideology. When “handing over” (New Vision, 15 March 2009) a rescued young woman who had been one of the St. Mary’s abductions 13 years earlier to her parents, Museveni insisted these “children” belonged in school, “My opinion is that they (former captives) should go back to school. It is important that we put aside funds, a programme for these children” (New Vision, 15 March 2009). Being able to employ the figure of the abducted girl in such a politically salient way depended on constructing an image of the Acholi as chaotic, stripped of masculinity. In the context of a militarized state, Museveni postured himself against the Acholi population as the true protector of Acholi girls since the Acholi men had failed as fathers and husbands to protect their children. This emasculation and even infantilization in the context of war emphasized the state's masculinity and military power as it persisted with a narrative of bringing order out of chaos.

The emphasis on the rescue of the girls reflects Museveni’s image as father of the nation, which, as I noted earlier in this chapter, draws from the colonial imposition of the idea of the western nuclear monogamous family. This implies that in the national narrative all citizens are sexed, as Das (2007) suggests. As father of the nation, Museveni had to protect the innocence and purity of his abducted daughters who were being taken for “sexual slavery.” Following feminist theories of the gendering of the nation, the risk of defilement and thus of reproducing the enemy means that female bodies must be vigilantly controlled and guarded (Mostov, 2000). The fertility of females is thus controlled by the state, therefore ultimately constructing them as sexualized. Females, Joane Nagel (1998) writes in her pivotal article about masculinity and the nation, are “bearers of masculine honour” (p. 256).
The idea of the “citizen as sexed” (Das, 2007) and the girls as sexualized fits with the documented incidents of male rape perpetrated by the military against Acholi men (Dolan, 2002). As a militarized state, soldiers are extensions of the head of state. These rapes represent the state emasculation of the Acholi, the transfiguration of the sexuality of Acholi men. In a context focused on development in which Museveni said repeatedly that the Acholi were “backward,” such emasculation is even more profound.

Continuing with this framework, the girls on the other hand, must be kept virtuous and as children in order to fulfill the dictates of modern development – go to school, marry, bear children, live in a monogamous and nuclear family. Having children born of an illegitimate marriage to a man with multiple wives in the context of an opposing and illegitimate political agenda, effectively rests outside of any state narrative and would have challenged Museveni’s image as head of state both internationally and within Uganda. Even among the Acholi, the local push to find the abducted girls aligned with his narrative.

In reality, Museveni’s narrative that outlined the imperative to rescue the abducted girls failed to achieve its suggested goal. One formerly abducted girl, for example, situated herself within his narrative and called on him as the father of the children of Uganda to end the war. She was one of the girls originally abducted from St. Mary's College but was later released. She appealed to Museveni’s ideology of development-as-nation-building: “If we really are the children of Uganda in the North, what can the government do to stop this? … I ask for more help from you to bring peace and children's rights to our country. We want to have a voice in our country to develop it, not destroy it” (HRW, 1997, p. 90-91). She asked him to support girls like her so they can rightfully take their positions in the nation as the future who will bring
development and wealth. And yet, to this day there have been no reparations or means provided to help any formerly abducted young woman or girl get an education.

### 3.3.4 The Figure of the Abducted Girl in Acholiland

Extending this framework further, the state's use of the imagery of the abducted girl can be seen as part of a war between competing heads of households. Das suggests that during the Partition, the female body “became a sign through which men communicated with each other” (1996, p. 56). Similarly in Uganda, the centrality of girls’ sexuality in the war suggests a power struggle fought upon girls' bodies. If we see both agendas (the NRM's and the LRA's) as nation-building projects, the heads of each faction represent the head figure of the nation, or the father of the nation. Both leaders use the sexuality of the girls to their own ends. Kony uses them as reproducers of his nation, as actively sexual bodies. Whereas Museveni uses their sexuality to construct them as vulnerable and in need of his masculine protection.

Baines (2014) considers the political project of forced marriage within the LRA. Based largely on research with women who were part of the LRA for 10-15 years during the beginning and first half of the war, Baines suggests that the sexual violence and forced marriage within the LRA “formed part of a political project of nation-building” (2014, p. 407). Baines argues that the literature on sexual violence in war alone cannot explain why the LRA used sex within the family unit as a central means of governing and were expected not to engage in sex outside the marriages or outside the LRA. If we situate this within ideas about gender and nation-building, we can understand the LRA's forced marriages as part of the political project to build a new Acholi nation. The LRA, as Baines demonstrates, used the girls (their reproductive powers, sexuality, vulnerability, and strengths) in their political project to build a nation.
Essentializing the role of Acholi girls in the ways both Kony and Museveni did situates them in difficult positions within their communities. The victimhood of the girls or portrayals of them as passive actors under the umbrella of a war between men suggests the girls have little agency. These imposed portrayals of the girls negate other more varied and complex interpretations of them as subjects. McKay (2005), for example, writes that girls are left out of constructions of child agency in conflict settings:

Despite recent and increasingly robust data detailing girls in fighting forces, the international community, governments, and militaries continue to ignore and deny the extent of girls’ involvement and offer inaccurate and reductionistic explanations for their presence. Pervasive gender discrimination in war-affected countries such as that existing in Northern Uganda and Sierra Leone, perpetuates the notion of girls solely as victims, most notably “sex slaves,” and as having lesser agency in perpetrating violence and terror than boys (2005, p. 393).

While in some ways viewing the girls as having little agency may present them as less threatening to their communities, this was largely not the experience among abducted girls. Locally, as witnesses to the violence endured by the Acholi from both the state and the LRA and the breakdown of traditional family structure, the girls embodied failure and transgression - failure of father figures and the transgression of community and family morals.

Many abducted girls and young women returned to face significant stigma in their communities and families. Others, however, were met with love (Amony, 2015). This latter group nevertheless endured significant hardship due the extreme stigma in their communities and the structural violence that engulfed the Acholi. The traditional Acholi family structure had been significantly disrupted (Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2013), exposing the vulnerability of females in the society. The female position in Acholi culture is more precarious than that of men. As most marriages are patrilocal, a woman is married into her husband’s family, meaning she comes to
them as an outsider. Until her bride wealth is paid in full, her position is insecure and she is regarded as unpredictable and untrustworthy (Allen, 1994). Once she becomes a mother, her position in her husband’s family is complete (Finnström, 2008). Consequently, a girl is raised with the knowledge that she is only part of the family temporarily.

During the war (and after), the payment of bride wealth became difficult for families. Cattle were the primary form of bride wealth traditionally, but since most Acholi lost their cattle during the first part of the war and then were displaced from their homes with very little means for making income, cash became the medium of payment of bride wealth. Women thus occupied a very liminal social position as the war progressed. Finnström (2008) notes that women are perceived as more prone to sexual immorality and volatility than men: “[G]irls are also more often held to be impure sexually and thus morally more dubious, even more dangerous, than boys” (p. 193). Girls are seen as weak, physically and emotionally, which is reified by imported western gender biases (Dolan, 2002). Thus, girls who transgressed social norms, such as abducted girls who were married into the LRA, were regarded as morally compromised and thus dangerous.

Porter (2013) illustrates how the abducted women simultaneously embody the transgression of traditional norms, victimhood from lack of protection, and being witnesses to the extreme violence that characterized the war:

A key part of the harm which women abducted by the LRA suffered, and continue to suffer, is the way in which their abduction broke the norms of Acholi approaches to marriage and love, approaches that are at the foundations of the social harmony of their moral community… In a sense, even though most of these women would be considered innocent of moral or even legal guilt for things which took place in the LRA, and virtually all were victims of extraordinary violence and lack of protection which allowed
them to be abducted in the first place – through no fault of their own, their very presence, and the presence of children in their parental home communities, is an aberration of Acholi norms and a challenge to social harmony (p. 244-5).

In customary law in Acholi, children belong to their paternal families - their ‘home’ is their father’s home. Many of the women who returned with children have been unable to connect with their children’s paternal families and most are reunited with their own paternal families, where they belong until they are married and become mothers. Hence Porter’s reference to the children as aberrations in their mothers’ paternal homes. As discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, the place where sex occurs, according to Porter, can add to the level of transgression:

[T]he location where sex takes place is important, and there are strong beliefs that sex “in the bush” is inappropriate and carries negative cosmological consequences. It violates the norms that define the purposes of sex around the creation of and cementation of “a home.” Sexual encounters within the context of the LRA occurred in a moral space outside of normal life, a space referred to by both those within and those outside the LRA as “the bush.” (p. 247)

Girls returning with children who were born from these sexual violations in the bush are reported to endure more severe stigma (McKay, 2005) and are more traumatized than those without children (Apio, 2007). The girls are what Das (2007) calls “repository of poisonous knowledge” (p. 54), inhabiting multiple subject positions – victim, transgressor, and witness. Elsewhere, I and others have explored how formerly abducted girls (now women) perform the everyday work of repairing relationships and positioning themselves as legitimate members of their communities and families (Baines & Rosenoff Gauvin, 2014; Baines & Stewart, 2011; JRP, 2012). Such work is slow, but their ongoing struggles to remake their lives is important
to recognize as it involves the complex work of challenging the social boundaries that keep their children excluded.

This work of the mothers remaking their lives through everyday acts of repairing relationships must be considered within the context of imbalance of social harmony, conceptualized by Porter (2013), in order to reflect both the agency of the mothers and children and also the struggles of the Acholi people. The discrimination of children born into the LRA by Acholi people can be understood as an effort to preserve and restore social harmony of their homes and communities. Looked at in this way, the children represent the moral and social disorder wrought by the war and the stigma represents people’s resistance to the insecurity they endured for so long. The resistance to legitimizing children born in the bush is a rejection of that disorder and insecurity, which would destabilize whatever social harmony remains or has been reconstructed. For many, reconstruction implies rebuilding their lives. The ‘re’ implies a return to what was. Children born in the bush never existed there before and so there is no legitimate social space held for them, or that can be ‘re’-built for them. Simply put, they do not belong.

3.4 Discussion

This chapter explored the construction of the Ugandan national imagery of the war between the state and the LRA. My goal was to demonstrate the complexity and historical depth behind the exclusion of children born into the LRA. Uganda has a long history as a divided and militarized entity. Significantly, gender hierarchies and a hegemonic gender model inherited from colonialism interacted with western narratives of modernity and rights to foster the kind of context in which the government could wage and perpetuate the war in the north. The state’s
use of the figure of the abducted girl helped to position Museveni as the father of the nation, contributing to its image as a successful sovereign state. And yet this narrative conflicted with the lived realities of Acholi. I have suggested that, using the figure of the abducted girl aided the war project, while damaging the Acholi social harmony. Consequently in Acholiland, the figure of the abducted girl represented moral transgressions.

The Acholi received little help reconciling the presence of children born into the LRA from the competing narratives of the warring factions about the abducted girls. The message from Museveni suggested that their girls were innocent and rescued and would continue their lives as the future of the nation and go to school. From Kony, the message was that their girls were producing the children of a violent new nation. Families and communities were more likely to reconcile the presence of the girl than her children, as evidenced by GUSCO’s policy of keeping pregnant girls at the reception centre until they gave birth, to prohibit the families from forcing abortions (Apio, 2007; personal communication 26 August 2016). The young mothers also reported that while they may be able to repair their relationships with their family, her family will often reject the children (Apio, 2007). This was also found to be the case among new husbands who rejected the children born in captivity but took the mother as his wife. The children’s existence disrupts the private realm of the family in a very public way. In Bosnia-Herzegovina where thousands of Bosnian women were raped by Serbian military, Carpenter (2010) says the focus was not at all on the children born of these rapes but rather on “the violation of women’s bodies and, through them, the purity of the Bosnian Muslim community” (2010, p. 143). Similarly in northern Uganda, the transgression is the focus and the children make it explicit. As such they were seen as signifiers of the LRA’s group identity. In this sense, they embody the boundary of difference and their experiences of unbelonging are the result of
the everyday politics of policing the constructions of difference in an attempt to restore social harmony: “[T]he very physical presence, their very bodies, may be imagined to signify and demarcate political community” (Carpenter, 2010, p. 191).

If we return to Das’ (2007) examination of the figure of the abducted woman during the Partition, she suggests that the state’s involvement in the recovery of the abducted women positions men in relation to other men and that relational state is achieved through the exchange of the abducted women. The state’s commitment to their recovery, she argues, reveals that it believes the authority of the father must be supported in order to have authority of the state. The case of Uganda, however, involves regional divisions and I have argued that a goal of the state was to control and subdue the Acholi. Once the problem of the abducted girls moved from the Acholi to the state, it sanctified the social contract in which Museveni was the father and the Acholi were the children. Locally, the social harmony was deeply injured in the process. Without official recognition from the state and little acceptance locally, the children born into the LRA belonged nowhere except in the one place they existed as signifiers of the LRA’s legitimacy as a nation-building project - in the bush where they represented the future of a new Acholi nation, and outside the margins of society and morality.
4. Place-making and Everyday Social Experiences

For many Acholi, children born into the LRA are signifiers of broken social harmony and they embody the immorality of the violence that led to their conceptions. Reflecting on his experiences of stigma, a boy born into the LRA who was not part of the project explained that he feels people remain distressed. “A lot of people still have scars from what happened,” he told me, “And they still have some resentment.” The scars and resentment suggest the social reconstruction underway has been ineffective at reconciling the presence of children born into the LRA. This boy’s impressions of the social context in Gulu and around the Acholi subregion is emblematic of stories shared by the children in this study. This chapter explores how the children experience their everyday lives and examines the micro processes underway that explain these experiences.

Drawing on concepts of stigma and place-making, my analysis reveals the important places in the children’s lives are embedded with memories from past tensions, yet they are also undergoing a process of reclamation and new meaning-making. Stigmatization and a sense of feeling ‘out of place’ are common threads in their narratives. To understand why, this chapter first presents the ideas of place-making after war followed by an explanation of stigmatization and its functions. The children’s stories about their everyday lives in four of the most important places identified by the children - school, home/town, village, and church - reveal how they experience their encounters and interactions. I posit that stigmatization is a mechanism of place-making used to exclude them from belonging in an effort to construct social harmony.
In each place, the children’s experiences highlight the most significant tensions and thus provide insight into the localized politics of belonging at play.

4.1 Stigma

Stigmatization is a prominent experience in the children’s daily lives. It shapes their sense of belonging and informs their behaviour and sense of self, which I will explore in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven. To understand the centrality of stigma in the everyday experiences of the children, I begin this section with an examination of what stigma is and why it is a significant feature of their lives. Then I will look at how stigma is used as a mechanism of place-making and how it plays out in the important places of the children’s daily lives.

Erving Goffman’s (1963) uses the term stigma to refer to discrediting attributes that reduce individuals “from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (Goffman 1963, p. 2). An attribute that stigmatizes the possessor might not be considered a stigma in other contexts, meaning that stigma is socially constructed. For example, the location of someone’s birth may socially discredit them in one context while that same location of birth is not stigmatizing in another context. A more refined conceptualization of stigma relevant to the situation of children born into the LRA suggests that an attribute associates a person to undesirable characteristics, or stereotypes (Jones et al., 1984). Link and Phelan (2001) suggest a structural component to the concept of stigma, by stating that stigma can be seen as the relationship between an attribute and a stereotype - when “elements of labeling, stereotyping, separation of ‘us’ from ‘them’, status loss, and discrimination co-occur” (p. 367, emphasis added) in a situation of social, economic, and political power. By including the consequences of linking a
person to a negative attribute, their definition opens conceptual room for stigma to be considered part of the “social machinery of oppression,” of structural violence (Farmer, 2004). Stigma in this sense, therefore, has relational elements as well as structural ones that must be considered as co-occurring parts of the phenomenon.

Adding to this, Yang et al. (2007) recommend that a conceptualization of stigma consider moral experience, which refers to when stigmatized attributes threaten what is most at stake for people in their social world. The response to the stigmatizing attributes thus arise out of a sense of danger, uncertainty, and preservation (p. 1529).

Stigma, we hypothesize, threatens the loss or diminution of what is most at stake, or actually diminishes or destroys that lived value. Put differently, engagements and responses over what matters most to participants in a local social world shape the lived experience of stigma for both sufferers and responders or observers. The focus on moral experience allows us to adequately understand the behaviors of both the stigmatized and those doing the stigmatizing, for it allows us to see both as interpreting, living, and reacting with regard to what is vitally at stake and what is most crucially threatened. (Yang et al., 2007, p. 1530)

This conceptualization is relevant for understanding how the children are excluded through an effort to restore social harmony and also how they experience it and negotiate their exclusion from belonging. For those doing the stigmatizing, the children embody threats to the social and moral order of the spaces in which they live.

4.1.1 Stigma, the Bush, and Morality in Northern Uganda

The children encounter stigma that suggest some people in their families and communities believe they are inherently immoral or less valuable than others. For example, Julius’ mom told me how a girl who lived nearby once yelled at him, “You children who were born in the
bush do not even deserve to live because they don't have anything good in their future.” Goffman (1963) writes, “By definition, of course, we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human” (p. 3). They are said to be “from the bush,” which Porter (2013), in her study of rape in northern Uganda, identifies as a place outside the moral boundaries of society. Oloya (2013), however, in his study of the experiences of seven former child soldiers in northern Uganda, points to a paradox in the stigmatization of those who returned - the stigma placed on returned child soldiers (often referred to as *olum*, or the one who belongs in the bush) fails to appreciate that they used, or “repurposed,” Acholi culture to survive in the bush. He notes that his informants spoke sadly and even bitterly about their reception upon returning because after all that they experienced and struggled through while in the bush to survive. The stigma they faced when they returned signified their rejection and that they were no longer considered *dano adana*, a human person; they were “not quite human” (Goffman, 1963, p. 3). All of this was in spite of the fact that the child soldiers had drawn upon their Acholi culture to help them survive.

The bishop I spoke to in 2016 pointed to the recent growing violence in Gulu and said that people are quick to blame former LRA soldiers or children born into the LRA. Such assumptions reflect the moral assumptions about anyone who spent time with the LRA, including the children. In an interview (personal communication, August 22, 2016), the bishop described for me several examples of how such moral assumptions about people who had been in the bush manifest:

If you see what is happening in Gulu, in the Acholi sub-region, some of the violence we see is so bad and we normally conclude has this person come, we ask this question, has this person been in the bush who has done this? Like this killing of the lecturer.61 The first question people ask, was he in the bush? Life has no meaning to them. They

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61 This refers to a murder of a professor that happened just a few nights before we spoke.
can just kill you… So that fear of that group, you see, these groups of children we were talking about who are now grown up is a reality. The fear is real. Look at the way the people are being killed in Acholi. They used not to be like that. But the killing in our place there is merciless. Merciless. We used not to burn people but today they kill a thief and they're burned… and the immediate question people ask, who has done this? So anything bad we blame those in the bush. And yet they could have not been the one who done it… So anything bad, it has that person been in the bush. Recently there was a man in Gulu here, they found head cut off. Now cutting another person on the head like a chicken! And when that happens, we just conclude that must be people from the bush.

In other words, the children are constructed as morally compromised - they are from the bush, there and not here: “[Communities] didn’t accept these children,” the bishop explained further, “Because of fear. People fear them.” They are perceived to have immoral characteristics. People expect the children to act according to this assumption and when their behaviours reflect the assumptions, the narrative about the children is reinforced:

The immediate family where the mother goes with the baby, with the child born from the bush or the children born from the bush, the community there just expect. Their expectation, they would say this child would behave differently. Would behave like the parents, like Kony. They would say Kony. Actually, these children are called Kony.62 They behave like Kony. And they would not take long they would see the behaviour the way they play with the children in the compound. And then they confirm it. Many times they are normal unless they are provoked. At first there are expectations but then those expectations would be manifested when the children are provoked.

Considered within the historical context of northern Uganda where violence and displacement affected the majority of the Acholi population and where the national peripheralization of Acholiland (Porter, 2013) significantly impacts social and cultural processes, the sen-

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62 The reference of ‘Kony’ or ‘Kony’s child’ is commonly used to refer to any child born in the bush not specifically Kony’s biological children. There will be other instances in the chapter where this term is used.
timents that fuel the virulent stigmatization of the children and their mothers become intelligible as a symptom of a shortage of cultural resources, as Oloya (2013) suggests. In other words, stigmatization of the children occurs as a result of an already over-extended cultural adaptability. Additional cultural resources are needed to reweave a social fabric that is inclusive of the children so they can be considered *dano adana*. The stigma they face, therefore, reflects the limits of formal and informal systems of justice to address the broken the social harmony (Porter, 2016). In the absence of appropriate justice mechanisms, people seek redress to rebalance the discord they feel.

4.1.2 Stigma and the Perpetrator/Victim Dichotomy

In the case of northern Uganda, I argue, this reconfiguration and inability to reweave an inclusive social fabric involves, in part, reinforcement of social boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate social existence – a hard line drawn between who is good and who is bad, reproducing the victim-perpetrator dichotomy and morally demarcating the exclusion of those considered to be perpetrators or are somehow associated with the perpetrators. Recalling from Chapter One what the social worker James said, people find it difficult to accept the child of a commander responsible for atrocities:

They would find it easy to accept their own daughter but not this child here. And some of them were born to rebel commanders who committed a lot of atrocities… It's very difficult because, for example, if your daughter was at school, was taken away in captivity, and she returns back with a child for whom you don't know the father or is born to some of these commanders that have committed a lot of atrocities in this sub-region. So it is really difficult to accept.

One boy of a top commander explained how people link him to the negative image of his father:
[T]hey say some things that really touch you. Because when people talk about him, they talk about him and his children. You see, they attach him to his children. You know, people's comments toward his children are really terrible. So so terrible!

Remembering back to primary school where several students learned his identity, Ian Anzo voiced a similar reflection:

Sometimes there are even students who come to me and say, ‘You! Your father did such and such a thing to me.’ Like this, like that. So I find it difficult, but I tell them that, ‘It's not me. I don't know. It's not me.’

One boy argued that the children should not carry responsibility for the violence of the war. The resentment nevertheless persists. “You know, they are bitter at us,” explained the boy,

You know, people are so bitter about what happened so they blame it… there's too much resentment… It's not the children's fault that all this happened. It just happened. It was out of our arms. And we the children, first of all, we didn't choose to be born. We didn't. I just happened by the way of God. The problem is some people don't understand, they just blame the children. The children did nothing! The children really did nothing. They didn't ask for it. They didn't ask to be born.

Such positioning of the children as representative of their fathers suggests a simplified category of ‘perpetrator’, failing to consider the complex victimization of many of the fathers who were also abducted and forced to serve as fighters. In her examination of the case of Dominic Ongwen, a top LRA commanders indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) who was also abducted as a child, Baines (2009) uses the term ‘complex political perpetrator’ to describe those like Ongwen - abductees who strategically navigate the complex moral landscape of life inside the rebel group. Such complex political perpetrators are responsible for their actions but their “accountability is mitigated by the circumstances which gave rise to [their] victim status” (Baines, 2009, p. 180-181). In contrast, simplistic assessments of the
conflict lead some community members to see all LRA fighters as equally capable of and re-
 sponsible for the crimes committed during the war. In a simplistic understanding of who is
guilty, holding the children accountable for their fathers’ assumed guilt becomes a seamless
association. “[S]ome of the people… used to say,” reflected a boy who was born in the bush,

That the commanders' children do not deserve to live. That they should kill them be-
cause their father had done this. Distant family on my mother's side used to say this. I
understand because they lost some loved ones in the process of the war, that's why they
were that way.

Even before transitioning out of the war, the children encountered stigma reflected in the
labelling of all those among the LRA as ‘rebels’. In the previous chapter, I discussed the in-
consistency of this labeling in the official discourse, how those who were ‘rescued’ were de-
scribed as ‘captives’, while officials described those they killed as ‘rebels’. While subsequent
stigma by Acholi community members also relies on this simplified categorization, the indis-
criminate stigma that played out on the battlefields reflects the political dynamics of the Ugan-
dan government and its war against the Acholi. The children who were old enough during their
time among the rebels remember instances in which they were treated without care for their
humanity. They were simply lumped together with the fighters and shot at and attacked with
no regard for their young ages and innocence. Junior watched as UPDF soldiers shot and killed
his little brother who was nestled on his mother's back. In Keila's journal, she drew children
running to their mother with other children lying dead on the ground while an airplane drops
bombs (see Figure 16).
Prudences tells a graphic story of her and her younger brother racing to save their lives during one of many battles in which children of all ages were killed indiscriminately:

When the plane passed, it now started dropping bombs. So I also ran. Then I recalled some teaching they taught us that when the plane is dropping bombs, you have to run and go under it. Because for it, it throws its bombs behind so it's safer if you go and you run under it.... On our way back to return to the others, I saw my step mother, she was lying there. They (UPDF) had stomped on her stomach and she was dead, even her baby. The army men (UPDF) stomped her head.

This girl now refuses to go near any soldier. She said she is too scared of soldiers as a result of her past - she is scared they will shoot her.
When I look at a soldier, I remember what happened. I remember when my dad told me, ‘You should not go with (step mom) to fetch water.’ I told him, ‘No, I have to go.’ Then I went. Then I came here. That was the last time I talked to my father… For me, I don't pass near them. But from my school we're near the barracks… Even my mom said God should forgive me that I don't like soldiers. She said, ‘One day you are going to get married to a soldier.’ If I were to get married to one, I think I will die today. I don't like soldiers.

Recalling the children who died in the bush, many reportedly by the UPDF and including their brothers and sisters, Emmy said in a group discussion in 2011 that he wants the world to know that the ones who are here are the lucky ones. The other boys lowered their heads and solemnly agreed.

Recognizing that the stigma they experience reflects an assumption that they are perceived as ‘other’ and associated with the crimes committed by their fathers, children of top-commanders still at large, in particular, fear serious backlash if people find out who their father is.  

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63 There are noticeable differences in the stigmatization of the girls and boys at school. I suggest this disparity relates to the victim/perpetrator dichotomy and the hegemonic model of hypermasculinity described in Chapter Three. Boys expressed greater stigmatization by school administration than girls. Both genders, however, related similar levels of stigmatization they experienced from other students. This gendered stigmatization by school staff reflects two primary sources of gender differentiation, both of which are applied upon an already problematic identity. Institutional and social beliefs that boys are more violent intersect with the conviction that the children have inherited traits from their rebel fathers and are thus more prone to violence. In a narrative later in this chapter of a head teacher who used his experience with one boy to characterize all children born in the bush, we see assumptions about their propensity to be like rebels, referring to the boy’s clothing style and unusual behaviour as evidence. While the head teacher does not differentiate between boys and girls, his only known experience is with one boy and he believes the boy’s past impacts his disposition and motivations. The other head teacher I interviewed only spoke about the boys born into the LRA when citing examples of problems at his school, despite there being approximately a dozen girls attending the school at that time who had also been born into the LRA.

Research has found that male former child soldiers face less stigma and rejection than the young women who return (Annan et al., 2009). Length of time with the rebels is a key factor shaping the response both males and females faced upon return - the longer they were with the rebels, the more likely they were to be rejected (Annan et al., 2011). Baines (2011; 2016) explains that while women were also fighters, their roles as wives and mothers was what brought them the most backlash. In these roles, the women were perceived to be fundamental to the operations of the LRA. Nevertheless, the popular imagery of the LRA is dominated by male fighters who are judged to be responsible for the violence. Reflected in this assumption is the hegemonic discourse of hyper-masculinity that shapes both the dynamics in war and perceptions about it (see Chapter Three). In addition to this gender discourse, Acholi children are considered to inherit their identities from their fathers. Baines (2011) posits
4.2 Everyday Place-making and Children Born into the LRA

Large scale political violence is said to get “absorbed into the life of places and given social meaning” (Agnew, 2014, p. 36). The materiality of places can trigger difficult and painful memories (Cresswell, 2004, p. 90) and so places become sites of contestation as people try to control those brutal memories and construct new meaning. The historical memories embedded in their everyday places affect how the presence and behaviours of the children are judged and why their exclusion is sometimes part of the construction of new place meanings. “Many – perhaps most – people do not want to talk about the war anymore,” writes Porter (2013, p. 27), “and seem in their conversations to almost beg you to pay attention to anything else, or everything else, about them.” The rebuilding and reconstitution that is a part of postwar social reconstruction, however, is inextricably tied to the violence of the past.

These memories are not only inscribed into places, but I suggest that for some people, the children who were born into the LRA embody the memories of violence and are therefore linked to the disorder and the insecurity that the society has more recently been facing. Their bodies are marked by the signs of brutality, their very existence is evidence of horrors and transgressions that helped define the war. Significantly, their lives stand in contrast to the many lives of children taken in the war; children who were stolen from the very places in which the children in this study live out their lives today. With the violence of the war so visible and present in the existence of the children, their physical presence in everyday places challenges that war undoes the social fabric in gendered ways, suggesting that the reweaving would also be gendered. Considered to embody their perpetrator fathers, hypermasculinity and the inheritance of identity both intersect to explain the gendered stigmatization the children experience.
survivors of war to forge new ways of being in relation to the terrors of the war (Das & Kleinman, 2000). Thus, not only are the children considered to be conceived from and shaped by a place outside moral society, but they also come closely tied to the violence people intimately experienced and feared in the very places they are now living.

The moral distinctions and evaluations defining the boundaries of exclusion that the children encounter reflect the normative drive to move past the war, to calm the anxieties created by the uncertainty and fear wrought by the violence of the war (Broch-Due 2005); the children in this postwar context embody this moral and social insecurity. The response is enacted through stigmatization - the common taunt “you from the bush!” for example, represents an effort to identify and isolate perceived immorality. In this way, the everyday practices and discourses (re)producing post-conflict moral and social order become part of the “dirty work of boundary maintenance” (Crowley, 1999, p. 30, cited in Antonsich, 2010, p. 12) whereby security is constructed through the absence and rejection of those identified as ‘others’ (Antonsich, 2010). Stigmatization thus becomes a tool or a mechanism of place-making. The children’s experiences reveal particular tensions prevalent in places of social reconstruction, and importance in their social lives: school, home/town, and village. Their experiences in each place are followed by an analysis of the place-specific function of stigmatization.

4.2.1 School

For the children in this study, school is simultaneously a place of hope and a place of exclusion. School represents a way out of poverty and an escape from the harmful aspects of their identities. And while the children report positive relationships at school, it is a place where they
experience significant stigmatization. This section will explore the fraught everyday experiences of the children in school as they encounter exclusionary normative expectations from peers and teachers.

One day, Proscovia overheard a teacher from a local school talking about one of the children in the study who she had caught cheating on a test. The teacher added, “She is one of Kony’s children,” reflecting a belief that a person’s behaviour reflects the moral communities from which they come. In interviews, head teachers at two primary schools in Gulu explained to me that children born into the LRA were identifiable through their behaviours. “Because,” said one head teacher, reflecting on his experience with children born in the bush, “Some of the kids, they have queer behaviours. And there are others who are brutal.” Another head teacher echoed a similar perception, “In fact [they are] destructive children. They’re too destructive.”

If and when people at school learn that the children were born in the bush, the children are shamed. Daniella Daisy explained, if people find out that she was born in the bush and if she subsequently does something bad or makes a mistake “[t]hey shame you with it. If you do anything they say you are Kony’s child.” She explained that those who learn about their pasts do not persistently tease them. Rather, they tease them only when they see an opportunity to suggest immorality, “Children don’t do teasing all the time. They do it when you have done something bad. They stay like they don’t know anything.”

One of the head teachers I interviewed generalized his experiences with a single child to represent all children born in the bush as immoral. Treating them categorically as problem children rather than acknowledging specific attributes of individual children allows people to feel that the children are fundamentally different. This establishes and justifies drawing firm
boundaries between themselves and the children and what they represent. The head teacher illustrated this stereotyping:

I can tell you something about those children. Actually we only had one who was here last year in P7. I'll try to give you a clear picture of the children who were born in captivity because the behaviour is a bit weird… One is when someone annoys him he believes the only solution is to retaliate, fight back. There is nothing like settling the issue amicably. They have to fight back by all their means. And then two, they do not like this strictness. They don't want to live by strict rules. For them they feel they should stay on their own without anybody instructing them what to do. And when you see what they do, most of the things they do are basically outside what is normal… Those children they do bullying. They bully other ones. They do too much of it. Too much of it. They tease, they bully and they don't care… There are very many effect of being born in the bush, I think. It has made to make them feel like even if you send me, I'll go back, I'm used to outside life. They are used to living alone. In fact, they're too lonely. They don't want to stay with others; it's very rare… [If] there were more than 10 (children who were born into the LRA), it would be really difficult. It would have caused some havoc at school.

Demonstrating how such categorical coding of individual children also colours the perception of their entire being (Coleman Brown, 2013), the teacher then added, laughing, “And… [his] dressing code was just like that of a rebel because he likes the clothes which you can tie up to here like this and heavy jackets, trousers.” Significantly, there were at least two other boys at this school who were born into the LRA at this same time. Those boys, however, managed to keep their identities secret so that none of the staff or other students knew that they also had been born in the bush.64

Remembering back to primary school where several students learned his identity, Ian Anzo explained how they associated him to his father’s alleged crimes:

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64 The boy the head teacher was referring to was Junior. Authar was also a student there at this time, as well as one other boy who is not in the project. These three boys all knew that each other were from the bush. Junior’s background was given by his guardians and sponsoring organization.
Sometimes there are even students who come to me and say, ‘You! Your father did such and such a thing to me.’ Like this, like that. So, I find it difficult, but I tell them that, ‘It's not me. I don't know. It's not me.’

Ian Anzo explains that such stigma impacts his education in a drawing activity in which he imagined what his life would be like if he had been born ‘here’ (see Figure 17). He described his drawing:

Here is how I would be if I was born from here. I would live well, dress well, I would be able to study well - studying would not be hard because there would not be much problem with stigma, so even getting job would not be difficult. So, life would be easy as I grow to become an adult.

The simple lines of himself born ‘here’ in contrast to the scribbled colouring of his drawing of himself as born ‘there’ suggests he imagines a simpler, easier life - “life would be easy,” he explained. As a child born in captivity, his face is barely visible compared to the other image,
suggesting he may see himself as partially invisible, referring perhaps to the constant need to conceal his identity to avoid the hardships wrought by stigmatization.

After the above drawing activity, an NGO wrote a letter to Ian Anzo’s school requesting permission for him to participate in an event as a representative of children born in captivity. “I don't like that school,” he later explained to me, “because there are teachers there who already know me; they know my background.” Before the letter from the NGO, none of the school staff had known his identity. He worried that many people at the school may have read that letter, leading him to be fearful and on edge: “There's a commerce teacher… I'm stubborn from inside the class, let me say like that. He told me that, ‘For you, you think I don't know anything about you, but I know more about you.’ That really scared me somehow.” Ian Anzo ultimately requested that his sponsor move him to a new school where he could feel the teachers were not judging him for his identity.

For some, their pasts have led them to be expelled by their school’s administration. As of 2017, seven of the children in the study had been expelled from their schools. In 2015, Idro was forced from her boarding school after a series of incidents caused by what she and her mother identify as cen, which they explained were the spirits of dead people they had passed while still in the bush that became attached to her spirit. When these episodes hit, she loses consciousness and becomes violence and cannot stop crying. The school said she behaves as though she is “mad.” Idro recounted the final incident in her journal:

It happened that one month after reporting (to school after the holiday), there was a party at our school but I was unable to attend because I was not feeling well and actually I could not explain all that was happening. And the next day which was Sunday was worse which made the whole school disorganized and Sister told the students to go inside the dormitory and it was locked so that I remained outside alone. But because of
God’s love and mercy, other students and the gatekeeper were there with me. Fortunately, the gateman opened for me the dormitory when my mind was somehow settled. I went and slept. The following Monday I woke up early. Although I was not feeling well I dressed up myself and went for morning prep. When students were for lesson Sister called the dorm captain to pack my properties and place in front of the office and my mum had to come and pick them. I told them that “it was not my making” but they couldn’t accommodate me in that school. I had to come back home.

Denied belonging in her school, she recalls pleading her innocence. The school was locked to keep her out and then she was told to leave, making it clear that she was not welcome.

For many people in northern Uganda school is a place representing hope and way out of the poverty and suffering that the region has endured for decades. Due to the particular nature of the war in northern Uganda, however, the schools are also embedded with memories of violence and fear. Schools are key sites in the production and transmission of norms and national and ethnic identities (Cheney, 2007). In this context, the children’s experiences of stigmatization can be understood as an effort to police the norms against the imagined threat embodied by the children, and at a location where youth are taught to have hope in the universal promise of education and the narrative that all Ugandan children are the future of the nation (discussed in Chapter Three).

During a period of nation-building, at a time when state prioritization of education in its development agenda and the (supposedly) universal primary education policy was internationally celebrated, access to an education for most Acholi children in Acholiland was of poor quality and limited, or simply impossible. In 2002, Oloya wrote about his home region during the war: “[A]fter more than a decade and a half of being refugees in their own backyards, the people of Acholi continue to watch school-age children waste away without the benefit of education.” Since the beginning of the war in 1986, hundreds of schools in the region were
destroyed and/or displaced (Lamwaka, 2014). In the rural areas of Gulu district, for example, 75 out of 240 schools were completely destroyed by 1999 (Lamwaka, 2014). In 2005, in Kitgum District, the education of approximately 100,000 children was served by only 30 learning centres. An NGO worker described the conditions in those learning centres: “[There are] learning centres but there is nothing like learning going on down there” (Refugee Law Project, 2006). Given the dangers children faced on their way to and from school and while at school, many parents stopped sending them to school (Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2005). The government, however, had promised equal access to education for children in the IDP camps as elsewhere in Uganda as part of its policy of protected villages. Nonetheless, in 2003 the government’s budget for the Ministry of Education was cut to provide for greater defence spending (HRW, 2003).

Because of their symbolism as places of hope, schools are often the first public sites to be rebuilt after war (El-Masri & Kellet, 2001). After the massive disruption and suffering of Acholi communities, schools represent people’s reengagement with everyday life, but one that is altered with new knowledge and memories of violence and loss (Das & Kleinman, 2001). Parents, students, and school staff are all in the process of recreating the meanings of schools. In the context of peace education in northern Uganda, Webster (2013) observed narrow conceptualizations of peace by teachers. In one example, they found that behaviour labelled ‘bad,’ such as breaking school rules and deviating from norms, was considered analogous to conflict. The mere presence of the children in this study is considered by some as a transgression of moral and social order. The children’s presence may therefore be experienced as a threat to social stability and thus analogous to conflict. I suggest this loose categorization of the children
as analogous to conflict translates into stigmatization and the construction of boundaries of exclusion as the meaning of schools is redefined against the violence of the war.

The children in this study are also actively involved in the process of producing their own meaning of schools as a place of hope. They are, however, also as objects of reference against which meaning is constructed by others. Like their peers, they invest immense hope in schools and in many respects, the role of school in their lives is unexceptional. Even the violence they experience at or related to school is likely familiar to those of their peers who are marginalized for other reasons. For the children in this study, however, schools are sites where they experience everyday exclusion that is rooted in their unique pasts and that most commonly arises from the stigma of their identities. Their identities are not normative and they are not considered to be the future of the nation by those around them. Rather, they are used in other people’s processes of meaning-making of schools - their peers, teachers, and school administrators who stigmatize use the children to draw clear boundaries between now and then, here and there, peace and war.

The drawings below (Figures 23-27) illustrate the significance of school in the lives of the children. They were drawn to demonstrate the important places in their lives. The Ugandan flag is a regular feature in the courtyards of schools throughout the region and country. The representations of the flag in these drawings serve as reminders of the role of education in the reproduction of the nation, contrasting the children’s experience of exclusion with the inclusive narrative that all children are the future of the nation. In each drawing, the children drew themselves either heading to school or at school. By inserting themselves into their drawings of school, they are embodying both the hope inherent in the promise of education and the narrative that children are the future of the nation. When school fees are challenging to acquire,
being able to actually attend school takes on a notable significance, inferring the significance of this double injustice of poverty and stigmatization. Against the backdrop of this financial challenge, their experiences of exclusion are all the more profound, alluding to the injustice of experiencing exclusion when they struggle so hard to move beyond the constraints of their pasts.

Figure 18 "Draw the most important places in your everyday life."

Figure 19 "Draw the most important places in your everyday life."
Figure 20 "Draw the most important places in your everyday life."

Figure 21 "Draw the most important places in your everyday life."

Figure 22 "Draw the most important places in your everyday life."
4.2.2 Home/Town

As a place, ‘home/town’ encompasses the urban centre of Gulu town, including the structures
where they sleep, their neighbourhoods, and the spaces throughout town as they experience
them walking to school, to the market, or to visit friends. That home/town refers specifically
to Gulu town is significant because Gulu has a history, unique from other municipal centres in
the north.

Home/town is not the place most people call ‘home’. Home is usually the village - the
traditional ancestral land of one’s paternal family. Villages are constructed and organized
through kinship whereby the inhabiting clans are connected by a common lineage (Rosenoff Gauvin, 2013). Many of the children do not have access to their traditional village as a result
of not knowing their fathers’ village or of being rejected. Many mothers chose to live in Gulu
for the anonymity afforded by its relatively large population in an effort to avoid stigmatization,
even if they had been welcomed positively by their families. The children’s desires to learn
their paternal identities, however, challenge their mothers’ ability to remain ambiguous about
their pasts. Revisiting the past to tell their child about their father is painful, but mothers also
know how difficult it is for a child to not have a paternal family or identity.

Joshua’s mother recalled how she tried to avoid the discussion, but her son was insistent
on knowing:

He used to ask me very many times. But I used to confuse and tell him my home, where
we usually go, is also your village. But I could see it in his face, he would be angry and
he would get annoyed with me. And he would tell me 'No, I don't think that is true. Your home cannot be my home.' Then he would stay and after some time he asked me
again, 'But honestly, where is my family? Where is my father?' Then I told him, 'My father is your father.' And he'd say, 'No, you're lying. Your father cannot be my father.'
So when he insisted after some time I decided to tell him the truth. I told him, 'Look here, in the past I was abducted. After the abduction I went to the bush and among the soldiers of the LRA, one was your father. But unfortunately, he passed away when you were only several months in the womb. So he also never saw you.'

Despite her efforts to placate his questions, Joshua insisted, reflecting his craving to know where his home is and who his family is and the significance of patrilineal identity for the children. Learning, however, that his home is not known, home/town is his only place to be, which lacks the elements of a home in the traditional Acholi sense - identity, family, and land.65

The absence of the children’s missing links is experienced more profoundly by painful rejections in the intimate spaces of their residences - with no ‘home’, they have nowhere to escape to. Stepfathers often represent a significant source of stigma - a problem common among children born of war around the world (Mochmann & DeTombe, 2010; Erjavec & Volcic, 2010a; 2010b; Stelzl-Marx, 2015). Reflecting a common attitude, a stepfather once said “Ah, you know, you people who came from the bush, you've got issues in the back of your mind.” Recognizing the limits of women’s access to resources in their patriarchal society, many women nevertheless regard having a husband as a means to survive and garner social respect.

65 The social worker James spent two years working with LRA returnees and children born into the LRA in the DRC, where identity is also patrilineal. Because most of the commanders are Acholi, he voiced concern for the futures of the children born to ethnic Zande mothers. “So sometimes when I [would] sit, very lovely children! I used to care for them so much because these are our children. I said I'm their grandfather. I used to care so closely for them. Even I was trying to mobilize resources to pay their fees. Because these are Acholi children among the Zande. So the Luo (Acholi) blood is in there… I could see the children themselves when they're hurt, when they're frustrated they tend to come together and speak in Luo. They now identify themselves with speaking in Luo, with the language. That's what started worrying me. And one mother was complaining because two of her children, the girls were adopted sent from home sometime when the children were annoyed they would go together and instead of speaking in Lingala, the Zande they start speaking Luo. So the adults could not… understand. If that continues, then there's a minority group which is going to come up. So this LRA has a lot of children of war from Teso, from Lango, from Acholi, from South Sudan, eastern DRC, CAR. We are yet to live to see what is going to become of these children born out of LRA captivity. There could be a minority group. So it needs to be explored further to see so if we don't integrate them, these children will begin to ask questions about who is my father; about their identity. And maybe at times when there are difficult questions, they will realize I have been born from, I am an Acholi from northern Uganda. And you know most of them wanted to go to Uganda when I was coming back. I said no, I cannot arrange.”
As one mother explained after telling me about the final violent episode in which her previous husband left, she explained that she felt it was not respectable for her to be single:

So, I decided at least to have a breakthrough. To avoid getting my children heartbroken all the time. I wanted now to stay alone anyway. I needed to make a decision to stay alone but when I look at my age also I cannot stay alone; I still need someone.

Even among men who were never abducted, however, caring for the children of another man is resisted and thus rare. Shanny Flavia’s mother explained that she is not sure the stigma is associated to their past or an unrelated social norm: “[T]hese men in Uganda do not want to support children that are not their own.” Most of those who have experienced problems with stepfathers, however, link the stigma to their pasts.\footnote{66} Idro’s mother shared the story of her husband's ultimatum, with regards to Idro and her sister:

What pained me so much is he told me that, ‘If you want me to stay with you, then you need to find some place to put these two girls.’ So I told him only one thing. I said, ‘You know what, when you came to me you found me when I had these children and I don’t have any other place where I can take these children; they cannot live anywhere else… I will not separate with these children.’

Reflecting the tensions from her stepfather, Idro wrote in her journal in 2015, “What makes me sad at home: When I lose one of my parents.” In this statement she connects her experience of exclusion at home by her stepfather to her absent father. In 2014, she wrote:

I have my mother but I don't have my father; he died from the bush. And my mother got married to another man but that man, he doesn't like us. And my mother, after returning from the bush, her own father refused her. And we are not to stay with her as my stepfather wants. If I knew before that it would happen like this, I would have remained and died from the bush because it is too much for me and I am the biggest.

\footnote{66} The fear of stigma has led the mother of at least one child in the project to hide the child's identity from the stepfather. Furthermore, from most of the stories gathered in this project, it seems that the child's past provides legitimacy to their stepfather's disinterest and even abuse. It is thus likely that the general social permissibility of stigma toward children born into LRA captivity contributes to their reportedly high rates of domestic insecurity.
Since he hates me too much now when I am around, like if am back from the school, the mood also changes.

Home/town for Idro is experienced with pain and sadness as a result, in part, by her stepfather’s unwelcome, which denies her belonging at the only home she has. If she had known she would experience such exclusion, she would have preferred to remain in the bush, to “die from the bush,” suggesting she feels that she belongs ‘there’ - a place of death - more than ‘here.’ Further reflecting her sense of being unwelcome at home, in 2011 she wrote in her journal, “Sometimes I feel like I should start moving in the streets and be a street kid.” This sense of being unwanted and pushed out from the only place she has to call home leaves her feeling as though the only place she belongs is in the immoral space of the bush or the in-between spaces of home/town - the streets, where no one makes their home except the most marginalized and excluded. The stigma’s function is to push them out, that is the sense they get from it.
Figure 23 “Draw most important places in your everyday life,” by Stephany.
When the children feel unwanted or shamed, they can remember the past: “When I am hurting or when I’m angry I think of those things.” Timothy said he remembers when he hears reports of deaths on the radio: “When there are radio announcements when they are reading about death.” Joshua explained what he thinks when he hears about death: “I think of the time when we were climbing mountains. I used to walk a lot with my mother. So when we would walk and reach somewhere we would sit and then kill some people and they cut people's ears… I feel pain in my heart.” In 2011 Junior said he remembered when his adult cousin yelled at him at his uncle’s home, “[I think] when they have quarrelled on me… because it hurts me…. Because when they are quarrelling they keep talking about the death of my mother.” Whether they are being stigmatized overtly because of their identities, or shamed for something unrelated, the children associate their exclusion and negative judgments with their pasts, perhaps suggesting the stigmatization that aims to exclude them from belonging and from resources is a contested part of their subjective identities. Contested because, as I will show in Chapter Five, the children employ strategies to avoid thinking of the past.

The children’s sense of exclusion is affirmed in part through their poverty. It is in home/town that they experience the structural obstacles to belonging most acutely. When they are hungry or sick, they are reminded of their pasts and make the connection from their current suffering to their suffering in the past.

67 Whether or not there is a stepfather involved, the children long for their missing fathers. In her drawing response to the prompt, “Draw the most important places and people in your life,” Stephany drew a school, church, her mother and father: “I like thinking about him… I think that my father should be there with my mother.” Reflecting a sense that not having her father present leaves her feeling abnormal and lacking a fundamental element in her life - something as fundamental as these places are in her life.
Finding work is difficult for their mothers and most have no support from the children’s fathers, or even from their own extended families. In addition to stigma, mothers also face challenges of dealing with trauma and sometimes physical disability resulting from their time in the bush. In her memoir, Evelyn Amony (2015) recorded details of her many daily struggles after she returned from the bush with two children, including her children’s frequent illnesses, her own trauma, and the endless work of social repair in her family, her community, and among formerly abducted women. They work on not only finding a job, but simultaneously learning how to be in society and among people who stigmatize, which makes life very difficult for mothers like Amony once they return.

Idro described how her mother had NGO support when she first returned but she faced constant stigma, “At that moment GUSCO could still offer some support for my mother so that
she should start with her living and care for us. Although, stigmatization was the order of the
day. Anywhere my mother will be moving, ‘Look at that returnee,’ was said by the community
members.” In this statement, Idro points to the stigmatization of her mother as a cause for her
poverty, making it clear that she feels excluded both economically and socially.

Modesta similarly relates her family's hunger to her mother's precarious salary and a
result of not having other skills or education because she was abducted at such a young age
and spent so long in the bush. The meagre and unreliable salary is further depleted because
Modesta's younger brother is frequently sick. She explained to me in 2014 how her mother's
work problems relate to his illness and how it all ultimately relates to their time in the bush:

My mother wasn't fine at all [this year] because she had a lot of problems anyway. The
struggle to get money for feeding. And then also at worse, the boy... also kept falling
sick and she didn't have money for buying medicine for him... A cough which prevents
him from breathing well and also flu... He's now feeling better. But when there is rain,
that's when he gets that kind of cough.

He was only taken once to the hospital “because there was no time. At her work, when you
miss work they chase you (end your contract).” Time away from work also means less pay,
which is not an option when they are already going hungry one week every month. Modesta
linked her brother's illness to their time in the bush:

We were being beaten by the rains when we were there. So we got certain diseases that
needed to be treated. But now it's difficult to get medication for that... I think [his sick-
ness was caused from that] because when it used to rain from there, there was no house
even for hiding.

In Modesta’s narrative, the layering of everyday conditions and events that result from lack of
resources are layered on one another intensifying her sense of exclusion.
Figure 24 "Draw the most important places in your life."

Figure 25 “Draw the most important places in your life.”
During the war, Gulu remained relatively secure (Branch, 2008). As a safe place, its population soared from 40,000 in 1990 to 120,000 in 2002. It became the administrative centre for the many NGOs serving the area during the war and offered rare economic opportunity. While many left and went to the IDP camps because they were unable to earn enough income to survive, many continued to arrive seeking safety and the possibility of economic opportunity: “[T]he only other option for most people [during the war] to life in town [was] life in the camps, which [was] generally regarded as vastly inferior, and so many in town see themselves as comparatively fortunate” (Branch, 2008, p. 7). Considering the lack of economic opportunity and frequent rebel attacks in camps, the town offered men, in particular, the (unlikely) possibility of fulfilling their gender expectations of providing for and protecting their families.

Described recently as “a bustling trade and business centre with buildings shooting up and a renewed sense of optimism” (IRIN, February 17 2016), the perception of Gulu town as a place of opportunity remains. With a growing population, which was projected to be approximately 154,000 by 2011 (UBOS, 2010), people continue to arrive in hopes of economic opportunity. Economic development is implied by the new tall buildings, the wide new roads, sidewalks, more consistent electricity, and a new large market in the centre of town. “However, scratch beneath the surface and you find an unequal recovery and plenty of hidden scars” (Okiror, 2016). Development has been uneven, benefitting only a small number of people. Displaced for years, those returning to their land experience insufficient support and services.

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68 Unemployment was largely due to a saturation of employable people.
to rebuild their livelihoods and survive in the rural areas. Town is, therefore, sometimes regarded as the only place with potential, or the only option.

As mentioned above, for mothers returning with children who faced significant stigma and rejection, town also represented relative safety because of the anonymity provided by the crowded urban centre. The Rock’s mother explained how she ended up living in town:

When I returned, I came and found that my mother had already another husband and we tried to live with her but her husband was really rude; he did not accept and allow me to stay. He said he cannot live with me in the same home with me with my children with whom I returned. So it was very difficult for me, I had to leave their home. Before my husband returned home, it was World Vision that helped me to rent a house. For the rest of the things, I needed to fetch water and even clothes you wash and people can pay you and also just try to keep my children. I fetched water for money. So that was a time when I thought, “Ah, if I'm going to have this kind of hard life, I wish I had not returned. Because I’m here again suffering, maybe I should have stayed in the bush; that would have been better.” That kept on disturbing me until when I got used to the new life I was living.

As the hub of the humanitarian economy, Gulu also provided economic opportunities for many formerly abducted women - skills training and contract employment. For the children without access to a village home, the town represents the only place they call home. For such children, home/town is laden with longing for their legitimate home - their paternal home, family, and identity.

The place of Gulu town, therefore, is embedded with this history of promise - of relative security and economic opportunity - against a backdrop of ongoing displacement, impermanence, poverty, high unemployment, and lack of services. The town represents not only a place of possibility, but also a last (and/or only) hope for many. At the same time, the presence of children born into the LRA in the everyday lives of people trying to rebuild and improve their lives in home/town represents a transgression of the social and moral order where those from
the bush terrorized the civilian population. The children’s presence in place of those who died is a stark reminder of what was lost. In the struggle to rebuild, I suggest that in home/town, the children’s experiences of stigma represent efforts to move beyond and avoid association with the war and the immorality that accompanied it. The way the children experience their exclusion through poverty suggests that it is also related to the problem of limited resources - when food and money are scarce, children born into the LRA can feel particularly marginalized.

The children move through home/town under the guise of anonymity. When their identities are revealed, however, they are met with boundaries limiting their belonging. The history of home/town engenders resistance to associations with the war and the children’s embodiments of the memories and immorality of the war make them seen by some as pollutants in the effort to rebuild and restore social harmony. Whereas in school the children are used in a process of policing norms, in home/town they are used in the effort to reject and move away from the war and its associations.

4.2.3 Village
The children experience the village as part of their everyday lives either physically during holidays, while living there, or as a critical absence shaping their exclusion. In Gulu, at the end of every term, schools break for a number of weeks and children return to Gulu from boarding schools. It is customary for children and often their families to travel to their villages for these holiday periods. These visits are an important means of affirming relations through the communal practices of storytelling and planting and harvesting crops. After years of displacement, when families returned to their ancestral lands some encountered questions of ownership - where one family’s property ended and another’s started. Tensions over land ownership lead
to violence in some areas. In a context of these tensions and broken relatedness as a result of the war and displacement, children who were born into the LRA commonly experience the village as place where they are denied belonging.

Idro’s mother was welcomed by her father in her village (Idro’s mother’s paternal village), but not by her step mother. As Idro's mother explained, her mother died while she was in the bush and when she returned, her father and his new wife rejected her due to fears about _cen_. Idro’s mother tried to see her father but his new wife “was very bad and abused me.” Idro recalls,

> When I was still in GUSCO, I thought that could be the end of suffering i.e. long distance movement, famine, massive killing, etc. Later on, my mum came back [to her] home where she was rejected by her own father. The brother to her father had to care for her now.

Finally, the maternal uncle of Idro’s mother took her from the reception centre and found a hut for her to rent on the outskirts of town, away from his family who feared spiritual contamination.

Keila's mother received a hostile welcome from her family in her village when she returned from the bush with two children. They initially ignored the news she had returned, hoping she would understand they did not want her. Then when the reception centre took her to her village, relatives chased her away yelling they do not want a rebel in their home. Feeling so unwanted, Keila's mother sought the only way out she felt was possible and found a new husband. With him in his village, however, she and her children were accused of “spoiling” the home. The children were told by the husband and his mother that they “ate like animals,” like the savage rebels and were sometimes physically restrained while the other children ate in front of them. They were frequently told, “You from the bush,” signifying disdain for their past and
an assumed moral inferiority. Ultimately, they were forced to leave because of the bad treatment. Keila told me that before they left she discovered a plan to kill her mother. Then Keila began vomiting blood from what her mother suspects was poisoning the day after her mother confronted her husband and his mother.

They left that home, but their experiences of exclusion continued. Keila's mother could not afford to keep all her children, so she sent her son to her village to live and study. In 2013, a sympathetic relative advised her that her son should leave the village because of increasing tension and risk to his safety. Part of the tension arose when she requested land from her uncles after her father passed away. Her father only conceived females so his brothers took his land and sold it. When she requested “just a small plot,” her male cousins (father's brothers' sons) rose up against her and told her she is “just a woman” and a physical fight ensued and she needed a panga (large machete-like knife) to save herself. She was told that people there do not want to have her children around, “They said, 'Here, a girl's children are not supposed to live here. They have their home (paternal family). They will grow and have a different perspective and how will they exist with our kids?’” Keila's mother understood this statement as fear of immorality due to the fact they were born to rebel fathers, inferring that her children will grow up with the mind and behaviours of rebels.

Not knowing who their paternal families are means they do not have access to their father’s village, the place that is culturally considered ‘home.’ Idro explains why her father’s home was unknown:

Since I was born from captivity and my father died a long time ago and from there (in the bush), there is no time for introduction to one another (when you are abducted and married). You get the person you go to be with without any brief introduction and sometimes you may be with a man not knowing the real name. I last saw him when I
was young but I can only remember that he used to love me more than any other person. But unfortunately he passed away and I did not know their clan.

As they moved toward adulthood, boys in particular ascribed significant meaning to the village as a place of cultural importance. The issue of land inheritance, something that is traditionally supposed to be guaranteed - a part of Acholi life that makes society run smoothly by serving as a kind of social support - is stripped from these boys and the loss is devastating because for most, it represents so much about being a person in their society.

Even though his paternal family had been located, Innocent recalled sadly how he had recently visited his paternal family for the first time but was shunned. He expresses a sense of injustice and bewilderment as to why when he just wanted to know his paternal family and to know something about his father:

I was surprised, even my own grandfather did not receive me well when I went there [to my paternal village]... I don't know [why]. I don't have anything I can guess because I don't know exactly what people think in their huts. For me now, I don't know. Because for me I had not even known this home before. I was born in Sudan, in Juba, the hospital in Juba. Even my father by the way, I don't know anything about him. I don't even know where he died. Maybe he died on the battlefield or something...

In a context where resources are so limited, paternal families can be reluctant to build any kind of relationship due to the expectations placed upon paternal lineage to support their children (Ladisch, 2015). One official from Lira was documented saying, “The fear of shortage of land has made families chase away the children born of war, especially the boys” (Ladisch, 2015, p. 18). The issue of land inheritance for their sons was critical in the eyes of the mothers from the time I first consulted with them in 2011. But with their sons moving closer to adulthood, their fears are more palpable. In 2014, a mother expressed her anguish over the issue and laments that her son will never have a “voice” anywhere because he has no access to land:
To me I feel that land inheritance is very very very important. And that is one thing that pains in my heart more than anything! Land inheritance is my biggest problem. Sometimes even when I'm listening to the radio and they're talking about land, it hurts me so much to the extent that I turn off the radio because I cannot continue listening to it. Because, one thing, my mother did not grow up at her paternal's place, she grew up at her maternal's place. But she delivered me when she was at school. After she delivered me she left me at her mother's place, that is her maternal's place. So I'm a second niece (grand daughter) there, but I grew up there. Now after growing up there, here I am... I don't even know where their home is (son's paternal family). And I still have these other two boys (not born in captivity). And at worse, I don't have the capacity to do what? To buy land or do anything now. It hurts me so much. I even end up saying, 'It's ok, there's nothing you can do. Let me just die the way I am, my children will also die the way I am.' Or I will die. Because I cannot get a plot of land. They will never have anywhere to have a voice in. At my grandmother's place, I should say now, that is the home of the mother of my mother, I cannot go there and say anything because I am a second niece (grand daughter) there. If anyone should go and claim land that is there, it should be my mother, not me. So that is one thing that hurts me so much but I know land inheritance is really really really important.

David did not talk about land in 2011, but by 2014 it was the first thing he spoke of when we had a chance to talk. He related it to not having his father or a connection to his paternal family, which was a result of his mother not knowing the necessary facts about his father. In 2014 he concluded that this familial void in his life meant his “future is not there.” In other words, he equated having a connection to his paternal family as security to allow him to imagine a future as a husband and father - to fulfill his expected life projects.

When David was younger, he was not much concerned with life’s key projects, nor were the other boys. “[I]t doesn't concern me,” explained one of the boys in 2011 who does not know his paternal lineage upon being asked if he is concerned about land inheritance, “That is things for grown up people.” But as the children grew, as we see with David’s story, they began to identify more with expectations of Acholi manhood. “I don’t have anywhere to live,” exclaimed David, implying what his mother said more bluntly: “[W]hen he becomes a man,
where should he go with his wife?” The magnitude of their concern and the shrinking possibility of fulfillment reveals how the lifescapes of children born in captivity are defined by their pasts in ways that deprive them of the resources needed to achieve life projects. As Joshua’s mother stated above, “Let me just die the way I am, my children will also die the way I am.” In other words, with no land, she foresees that her son will be unable to move beyond the limits placed on her life by her past in any meaningful way.

Even if the children can or could access their paternal village, however, it is not guaranteed to be a safe place. In 2016, Ian Anzo explained that he does not like going to the village. His mother had access to a small plot of land to grow a few crops. He said he is scared for his life in the village and he told me to get his mother to tell me the story of the boy who was killed recently.69 “The boy was the son to some man, ex-LRA,” his mother told me.

So this man even used to live here in town. But when he lived in town after some time he made a decision to go back to the village. So he went and constructed some huts there so he would live both in the village and in town sometimes.

So when holidays came, he decided to go with his son to the village… There was a funeral activity happening at their home. Many people came, but he's a soldier because he refers now to NRA (UPDF), the army; he's also working as a soldier. And then at the same time he's working as a boda.70 So he left his son home there. He rode and came back to town to pick a few things and go help with things for the funeral.

He left the boy there but when he went back home he did not find the boy there. I have forgotten his age, but he was already big because he had already completed S4.71 So when he went back to the village he did not find his son but he did not even imagine that maybe something bad was being done to the boy. He just thought maybe he went

69 He said he did not remember all the details.
70 Motorcycle taxi driver.
71 Similar to grade 11 in Canada.
out for a short walk. He waited the first day, the boy did not come back. So the second day he started looking for him now.

The funeral was already done, they needed to come back to town. So he said, ‘I should get him so that we go back home.’ So he looked for the son and could not see him. He came back to town, sent radio announcement, nothing. They kept on looking for the boy, but after three days they found him dead.

So when they took him for the post mortem, they went and found, you know how sugar is packed in plastic like this… So they picked the inside white plastic bag of the sugar packet and then covered it on his head so the boy suffocated. Because during the post mortem they did not find any mark or anything twisted or something broken. Probably they just made the boy suffocate…

That man cried and said maybe his son was killed because they thought that when he was in the bush he did many bad things to people's children and now people are jealous that now he killed people's children and now his child is studied. So he said he wished so much that he would not have taken his son to the village.

The story is experienced with fear and contributes to Ian Anzo’s sense of the presence of a local politics of belonging, which is suggested through his refusal to go to the village with his mother. He feels unwelcome and denied the safety of belonging. Similarly, many children report the village to be a place where they experience stigma and violence as a result of their identities. The children explained that family members in the village often held them responsible for their losses during the war:

The schools were not good [in the village] so I had to come here (Gulu) and then we were facing the same issues. So I had to go and decide the most important thing was to conceal my identity because some of the villagers on my mother's side knew about it (identity) so they were using it against the family because in the process some of their family members lost their lives, in the process of the war. So they would just put all the resentment on our family, saying we are the cause.
Their experiences reflect stigmatization that situates them as perpetrators of the violence residents experienced during the war. The children are therefore held responsible for the violence endured during the war in which the LRA (and to some degree the UPDF) targeted villages turning them into sites of massacres\(^{72}\) and terror.

Villages, however, are also the backbone of Acholi culture. The Acholi are a largely rural population of subsistence farmers, where land title is based on customary land tenure, and lineage is the “primary means of social organization and survival” (Rosenoff Gauvin, 2013, p. 40). The forcible displacement of the rural population caused massive disruption to Acholi social organization and cultural transmission. The process of returning home after displacement therefore represents regaining control, self-reliance, and the reconstitution of cultural identities. Reclaiming ancestral land was a fundamental piece in efforts to recover after the war left.

This process of reclamation, however, has brought problems. Questions of land ownership have become a contentious issue. When I met with the Aswa County\(^{73}\) police spokesperson in 2016, he explained that conflict over land has become the most pressing issue for police:

Then we have issues of land wrangling. This has been one of the worst in this region… You find because of the issue of the war, most people were taken up in various camps in this region. And now people have spent a number of years, because this war was almost 20 years, and then they come back to their villages. It was a big challenge because most of the elderly people, some of them died form the camps. Now these young ones who grew up from the camps, maybe they were born from the camps, a 20 year war, if maybe someone was born, maybe even if 1990, certain person is already 16 to 17 years. He's already a big boy. He will not know the land boundary and all that. But they do not know. So you will find that at the land, people will start encroaching their neighbours’ land or others go to a different place, they just start thinking that probably

\(^{72}\) JRП has documented a number of these massacres:
\(^{73}\) This county includes Gulu.
I think this is where we used to be. And that has been probably one of the worst because at the end of the day, people picking spears, they're fighting with spears, pangas. And about 80 percent of most of the cases that comes to the police, when investigated will go to land related issues. Because assault, for threatening violence, most of these cases once investigated [they go to land related issues].

The massive socio-cultural and geographical displacement from the war upset the system of customary land tenure while also intensifying the need for land for survival. With identity and sense of belonging in the Acholi region so closely tied to the village (Mogensen & Obika, 2013), contestation over land impedes the process of rebuilding social ties and ultimately of reconciliation that is inclusive of children born into the LRA. The children’s experiences of the village as being unwelcoming and painfully absent suggests that the children are caught up in the process of land reclamation as representative of the causes of displacement as well as people whose claims to land are readily disavowed and challenged in the face of shortage and need. (Figures 31-33 reflect the importance of access to land.)

74 Machetes.
Figure 26 Drawing response to prompt, "Draw the most important places in your everyday life."

Figure 27 Drawing response to prompt, "Draw the most important places in your everyday life."
4.2.4 Church

Church is a place unanimously referenced by the children as one of comfort, relief, and hope. It therefore provides a counter example as a place of unwavering belonging for the children. As such, a look at the specific history and meaning of the church in Gulu town reveals key elements that enable belonging for the children. Several children said they go to church and also the mosque, suggesting that being in any place of worship, no matter the specific doctrines, is the primary attraction.

For most of the war, Joseph Kony and the LRA are said to have demonstrated considerable trust in the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) to broker a peace deal (Kendal, 2003). Religious leaders played a significant role in representing the needs and desires.
of the Acholi people in terms of insisting on a peaceful resolution, documenting their suffering, and speaking against the many violations and atrocities they experienced at the hands of both government forces and rebels. Gilbert Khadiagala (2001) explains that by the end of the 1990s, the Acholi people lacked clear political leadership as a result of their mistrust of the government. The ARLPI filled the void to serve as the “locus” of community leadership during the second half of the conflict. It functioned as a bridge between the Acholi people and the government, but also mobilized the various stakeholders (NGOs, local and national leaders, military and LRA representatives, and the international community) to find a peaceful resolution.

A founding member of ARLPI, the bishop recalled how the group looked at the children who had been born into the LRA. In their discussions, he explained:

There was no distinction of abducted or born in the bush. Just children. You know, from the peace talks perspective, a child is a child and a child is like the Kingdom of God. Jesus Christ compares the Kingdom of God with a child. So we look at a child like God's Kingdom. Let this child come out.

Catholic and Anglican churches, as well as mosques, became places of systematic advocacy for peace and reconciliation through sensitization programs, particularly targeting the reintegration of those who returned through the Amnesty Act. In this way, places of worship symbolized peace and reconciliation. The bishop’s statement above echoes the narrative the ARLPI disseminated across the Acholi sub-region.

Most of the children in the study drew a church, and much less frequently a mosque, as one of the most important places in their lives (see Figures 29-31): “I drew a picture of a

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75 Islam is a minority religion in the region, but it participated with the churches in the movement.
76 The Amnesty Act, passed in 2000 by the Ugandan parliament, aimed to encourage defectors from the LRA. It offered amnesty to all Ugandans who were part of the LRA upon reporting to a local official, denounce the rebellion, and turn over all weapons. In return, those granted amnesty were given a certificate and a resettlement package, which included a mattress, a blanket, a jerrycan, and cooking pot (Carlson et al., 2008).
church…I love to pray.” Junior said he likes going to church and when asked what he liked about it, he said he enjoyed drawing church related pictures to keep his thoughts in the present moment, “I like drawing the church and people who are going to pray.” He added three years later,

These are the important places in my life (referring to his drawing). This one is the church. So it's the church and the home that is important in my life... If you find that life is difficult or it’s hard to just stay there, you go to church and pray and relax there and come back.

For children born into the LRA, the bishop’s statement is representative of the inclusivity they report when they talk about their church and (occasionally) mosque experiences. Church and the mosque are places in which the children feel a sense of belonging. They are places where everyone is equal and the children report that it feels good to be in that environment where they trust that God sees them as equal. The specific history of the role of the church during the war reveals the significance of several elements of place and belonging related to the children in this study. Churches were largely spared from bearing memories of wartime atrocities. Rather, they remained places of hope throughout the conflict, and facilitated a diplomatic balance between the warring factions. The religious leaders’ efforts to negotiate with all sides for a peaceful resolution supported their plea for the acceptance of returned LRA. Insisting on the constant humanity of those returning from the LRA, religious leaders therefore reinforced a culture of equality and acceptance in places of worship. Because it is a place that is not embedded with memories of violence and one in which a welcoming narrative prevailed, the church is a safe place of belonging for children born into the LRA. Their identities and
pasts are not as relevant in these spaces as others because of the normative values instilled through the leaders.\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{77} The popularity of Evangelical Christianity, and Pentecostal in particular, has expanded in the postwar period as a result of significant international missionary efforts. The specific history of Evangelical churches is different than those that are part of the ARLPI, but from the children’s positive accounts of Evangelical (“born again”) churches, it seems the culture of acceptance is consistent.
Figure 29 "Draw the most important places in your everyday life."

Figure 30 "Draw the most important places in your everyday life."

Figure 31 "Draw the most important places in your everyday life."
4.3 Discussion: A Micro-Level Politics of Belonging

The children’s everyday experiences reveal a local politics of belonging in the most important places of their daily lives. Their experiences with exclusion reflect the “dirty work of boundary-making” whereby the identities of the children are invoked, along with their places of birth/conception and the socio-cultural values underpinning the process of place-making that is part of the social reconstruction efforts in the postwar period. In each place, the children experiences reveal different functions of stigma - policing/regulating norms, rejecting the past, protecting resources, and regulating morality. The resulting feelings of exclusion and being pushed out of belonging in the places of their lives is captured in Idro’s poem about the spoils of war:

**THE ENDLESS SUFFERING CAUSED BY WAR** (poem by Idro)

War, war, war
We want to know majorly the cause of you?
Mercilessly you grabbed people of all kind, not minding whether sick, lame, poor, right, educated,
harm them to fulfill your desire

Some have been born in war,
Lived in war situations and others died.
Because of famine, bad acts posed onto them such as cutting off their breasts, mouth, ears, burning them
and innocent ones are killed mercilessly.

As a result many parents lost their children.
Many children are left orphans,
lost of relatives, early pregnancy, many raped, defiled and many where infected with STI.
All was brought by you.
Some of our parents have been abducted when they are young, grew from the bush some died and the lucky ones escaped due to the hard situation to save their lives. Expecting peace of mind when they are at home but the opposite instead, especially dealing with livelihood and many different ways you touched them made them uncomfortable in the community since others are mentally injured, others being haunted by spirits and many mothers facing serious problem with their remarried homes with their children.

War, War, War
You made our lives difficult to socialize with people in the community, everywhere they learnt about us, fingers pointing wherever we moved, even from school. Where should we stay? How are we going to prosper really in this world of war? People calling us rebels, yet we are not.

You killed our fathers making our mothers to remarry to the step fathers whom behaves like wild beasts to us the children. Yet the bond between the mother and the child is the strongest than all the bonds in this world, but a wild beast will make it breaks due to fear and out of stress every time. Young girls are getting married, boys involving themselves into gambling. Is this the joy and pride you want! As people suffer.

How will our lives and the generation be? You caused suffering that has no destination. Like hell that will never stop burning. Nowhere to dwell, nowhere to stand, no shadow to cover us, no one beside us, we are hungry lonely on air

Our songs are never sung and our voices are never heard. Why, why really!!! We thought we would change but there are a lot of question marks ???. still ahead of us When will we stop suffering and gain peace of mind?
In her poem, Idro inserts children born into the LRA into her depiction of the trauma suffered throughout the society. In Chapter Three, I examined the marginalization of the Acholi - the Acholi sense of being excluded from national progress and even being subjected to social torture (Dolan, 2009). I have also demonstrated that children born into the LRA are often not considered to belong in the social spaces of northern Uganda. In these places, the reweaving of society involves new meaning making of places in an effort to recover and move past the war. Place analysis reveals that children born into the LRA are often caught up in a local politics of belonging in which they are stigmatized as a means of emphasizing a rejection of or distance from the immorality, injustices, and memories of the war.

In this poem, however, Idro acknowledges children born into the LRA as just one of the many kinds of Acholi war victims who are all part of the enduring suffering throughout the region. In this way, she claims suffering but also equivalence (“Many children are left orphans, lost of relatives, early pregnancy, many raped, defiled and many where infected with STI”). The poem insinuates that children born into the LRA belong within the Acholi experience of regional and ethnic exclusion and she seems to speak directly to the Acholi people, but also to the government who allowed it all to happen and who has failed to effectively support the reconstruction of the region. These suggestions, Idro links the local politics of belonging that she encounters in her daily life (“fingers pointing”) to the macro-level politics of belonging that enabled the atrocities of the war (“Mercilessly you grabbed people of all kind, not minding whether sick, lame, poor, right, educated”).

Relating to her own experience, Idro refers to the stigmatization in home/town and at school. Reflecting her exclusion from having a ‘home’ (home village), she asks, “Where should
we stay?” Accentuating this sense of place exclusion, she later writes, “Nowhere to dwell, nowhere to stand, no shadow to cover us, no one beside us, we are hungry lonely on air.” Such expressions of a sense of being denied belonging mirror her statement from a drawing activity in 2015 (see Figure 33) in which she concluded, “I feel out of place”:

Figure 33 "Draw yourself as an adult who was born here/who was born in captivity," by Idro.

In this drawing activity, Idro compared her life as a child born “from captivity” (there) to how she imagines her life would be if she had been born “from home” (here). Her sense of not belonging, of feeling “out of place,” results from a web of exclusions she has encountered as a result of her past. After being physically locked out of school, Idro was sent home to her
mother’s hut. There she suffered violence by her stepfather but she had no family home to go to. She therefore became dependent on a man in order to escape. In the process, she contracted an incurable illness.

When asked what her options were with regards to her spiritual problems that led her to be physically locked out of her school, she said sadly, “I don't know exactly, but maybe if my mother was not abducted, she could have gotten a different man and they could have produced a child different than me.” Suggesting that it would be best if she did not exist at all is an extreme expression of feeling excluded. By stating that the only solution may be to go back in time and not be born, Idro links her problems to her mother’s abduction. She seems to suggest that if her mother had not been abducted, a child born ‘here’ rather than ‘there’ would belong. Just physically being ‘here’ is not enough for belonging, she reflects. “I thought I may have a better life from here,” Idro wrote in 2015, “but the situation is becoming worse and I don’t know what to do.” She explains that she had hoped that life would be better once she was physically ‘here’. She now realizes, however, that belonging depends on more than one’s location.

The children’s identities shape how they experience each place - school, home/town, village, and church. At the same time, each place is marked by memories of the war. Through everyday social life in these places, people actively reclaim their meanings from places of violence and fear to ones of promise and hope. As physical embodiments of the violence, the children’s presence pose challenges to this process of reclamation, which is when the children encounter boundaries of exclusion. Countered by their consistent sense of belonging in church,
their experiences of exclusion in other places affirm that memories and narrative are critical elements in the local politics of belonging.
5. Negotiating Belonging

The children in this study, I suggest, refuse to accept their exclusion, they do not allow themselves to remain the constructed effects of power dynamics within the places of their daily lives that reject and denounce the children because of their identities. This chapter responds to the research question, ‘What strategies and resources do the children use or access to help navigate their everyday lives?’ I suggest they navigate their everyday lives toward better life opportunities by employing strategies to resist the boundaries of exclusion and negotiate a partial belonging.

A boy who studied outside of the Acholi sub-region explained to me that he has never told anyone that he was born into the LRA. He said he feared how people would react and how it might affect his ability to study and improve his life. As a result, he employed strategies to keep the secret:

In public with people or when some friends bring up that topic, sometimes they start saying things that really annoy. And the best thing I do is I keep quiet. I just keep quiet. If they ask me I just tell them I don't have anything to say about that topic, I cannot say anything about it and most especially at school they used to ask me a lot because they knew I came from the region. What I used to tell them is, “For me, I don't know anything about this, I don't know so much about this so I cannot tell you anything, I left that place when I was young. So, I cannot tell you anything, I'm just like you guys.”

This boy’s strategies, I suggest, are examples of his negotiations with the boundaries of exclusion, insisting that he belongs – “I’m just like you guys.” His goal is to negotiate belonging in order to navigate successfully to a better life position.
Navigation and negotiation are terms used to describe social practices. The term navigation invokes the image of an individual navigating around obstacles. Henrik Vigh (2009) suggests that the term navigation implies motion within matter that is fluid and changeable, referencing the literal meaning ‘to sail’. Social navigation, according to Vigh, refers to the movement of an individual agent within the movement of the social and material world. More specifically, social navigation refers to a person’s movement that takes into account both the immediate environment and also the imagined (predicted or anticipated) possible futures. In writing about resilience of young people across cultures, Michael Unger (2008) includes both navigation and negotiation as critical features of his definition of resilience. Youth navigate toward a position that they perceive to be better than their current one. In Unger’s case in point, they navigate toward health resources.

The children in this study can be said to all be navigating toward adulthood, but this broad navigation is best broken down into smaller ones such as navigations toward education, health, and financial security. They are therefore no different from other children with common aspirations. The negotiations they make on their way toward these goals, however, inevitably involve their identities and pasts. They negotiate with forces and structures in an effort to achieve their goals in ways that are meaningful to them. The boy from the quote above, for example, is navigating toward completing his education and negotiates his belonging by not revealing his identity so he can access his education free from the burden of discrimination and build a better future for himself.

Discussions of navigations and negotiations involve questions of agency. The children’s agency is mediated by the social forces and structures in their environment (Lee, 2012; Utas,
Alcinda Honwana (2006) suggests that young people in positions of limited power, such as child combatants in war, demonstrate “tactical agency” in which they have the capacity to navigate only their immediate and short-term contexts and opportunities. In less dire situations, however, youth employ “strategic agency” to navigate their lives in the interest of long-term goals. I suggest that the children’s negotiations are examples of strategic agency employed to navigate their everyday lives toward a better future.

The children in this study actively negotiate a partial or limited belonging by employing strategies of forgetting, passing, prayer, and claiming their rights in order to navigate their everyday lives. Through these efforts the children seek to have others treat them equally and they refuse to accept their marginalized positions by maneuvering to opportunities, or simply as everyday participating members of their families and communities. I argue that employing these strategies enables participants to negotiate a kind of belonging - a limited or partial belonging that is always contingent on the secrecy of their identities.

5.1 Forgetting: 'When I Forget I Stay Freely'

Reflecting on what he has observed about returnees, the social worker James suggested that education and financial security are how the children can overcome the burdens of their pasts:

I’ve seen for those who were in captivity who went to school whether at university and what have you, the stigma is not there… the ones who went to university, they are having a job, they are earning a living and so forth…. The child needs education because they say education can give the child a future. To give a better life that can help you put behind the past… But those who really don't go far with education and start getting a lot of challenges in life normally and start asking a lot of questions about identity.
In other words, material improvement allows them to “put behind the past.” Rosalind Shaw (2007) documents how female witnesses in Sierra Leone participated in the TRC primarily because they believed they would be reimbursed for their testimonies. In contrast to the TRC’s promise of redemptive truth-telling, the women believed that material resources from the TRC were the key to their healing, which they termed “forgetting”. In Pilar Riaño-Alcalá’s (2006) ethnography of remembering and forgetting, she explores how youth affected by violence Medellín, Colombia used memory work in their everyday lives and identities.

Forgetting is a strategy I heard often during my time in Gulu. It refers specifically to not thinking about experiences in the war and more generally to community healing and reconciliation. Like the witnesses in Shaw’s research, forgetting was desirable for the children in this study and a goal, which they equate with emotional health. Riaño-Alcalá’s (2006) work begins with a generational forgetting where youth claimed to have forgotten the reasons for fighting. In her conceptualization, forgetting is a social practice and a kind of memory work. According to Nicolas Argenti and Katharina Schramm (2010), memory is, in part, constituted by forgetting. Importantly, forgetting is not the erasure of memories. Rather, practices of forgetting represent strategies of coping with insecurity and social tensions.

The children in this study said that experiences of stigmatization and hurtful feelings triggered by other interpersonal conflict, more generally, invoke negative memories of their time in the bush, engendering a sense of difference from other children. In response, they employ strategies to ‘forget’. Forgetting, as analogous to suppression and silence, provides the children with distance from their pasts and from their identities that bring them such hardship, as evidenced in this statement by Authar: “I think sometimes, but when I forget I stay freely.”
Most of the children’s references to forgetting were in the context of being reminded of their pasts and of their identities. This is exemplified by how children who never met their father, or who have no memory of him told me they are forgetting him. Specifically, it is the absence of their father that they wish to suppress within themselves. As this boy who had never met his father exclaimed, “I have even forgotten about him. I don't think about him now.”

Through acts of forgetting in this way, the children challenge the priorities inherent in the boundaries of their exclusion. That is to say, the boundaries foreground their identities and pasts as primary markers of exclusion. By suppressing and silencing their memories, they are trying to minimize the significance of those aspects of themselves.

Most children shared that playing and socializing with friends were strategies to forget. Modesta explained, “I stop thinking about it (the past) when I feel that bit of headache because I will definitely get up and start to play because I want to stop thinking about it.” She noted that she is losing interest in play now that she is older, so instead, “sometimes I go pick a jerrycan and go fetch water.” Idro added, “When they (memories) start coming, they stop by going to your friends and talking.” Play and friends are key methods in this practice to distance themselves from their pasts.

Playing was a key strategy for Junior to forget, as it was with all the other children. “It is my head which starts thinking about it (the past) when I am just seated,” he explained, when he was idle and feeling lonely or after he was beaten. “I must go to play so that I forget about it... [so I] get up and go play somewhere,” he continued. He would go play with the neighbourhood children with whom he said he played ‘fosi’, a game played with a tin can and small ball.

79 A few children experience intrusive thoughts, or “traumatic memory” (Argenti & Schramm, 2010, p. 10) in which memories are detached from their consciousness and become involuntary.
He also played football, he said, adding that “my own [football] is not there,” meaning he did not have his own a football, so he could only play when owners of a football wanted to play.\footnotemark

In 2014, Junior explained that he continued to practice forgetting, in part to avoid feeling the embodiment of past violence and emotional pain (Kristensen 2010): “I feel that I should not think... It increases the pain on my chest... I first started thinking and then the pain... Any time it comes.” Mostly, though, he was reminded when he was sick. When the thoughts begin coming, Junior said, “I just get up and go to play... Apart from playing there is nothing else I can do,” adding later that reading and drawing sometimes helps.

In Junior’s reflection, there is a hint of resignation, which I attribute to the lack a more supportive network around him. Junior’s parents and only full sibling were killed in the bush and he has been shuffled around between extended families, unable to trace his maternal family, and getting very little education before I met him. While he had found a sponsor for school, he still experienced minimal support for basic needs, such as clothing and medicine. In defining the terms navigation and negotiation in his conceptualization of resilience, Unger (2008) stresses that a child can only navigate toward what is available and potentially accessible. Forgetting is a strategy to negotiate their belonging, but perhaps he needs more support in his social environment to do so with more success.

As the study went on, most other participants reported more forgetting. In 2014, Prudence related that “these days I don't think.” Emmanuella commented in 2016 that even though she was relatively old when she transitioned (eight years old), “My head is now forgetting a bit... I don't think because I am forgetting most of them (memories).” Forgetting, as

\footnotetext{In 2011 he was not attending school so finding a ball problem because other children were not around to play during most days. When something happened that triggered his thoughts about the past he said, “There is nothing I do,” and he simply remained sitting and presumably thinking.}
described above, can represent an effort to create distance from the past. Later in the study when I asked about the level of stigma, some children reported that “people are now forgetting the war” to mean they experience less stigmatization. In conjunction to their own practices of forgetting, the children perhaps offer this assessment of their society’s changing relationship to the past as an effort to insert themselves more fully into the social fabric of their communities.

5.2 Passing: ‘I’ve Kept This for a Long Time!’

Beth: How do you feel about telling people you were born in the bush?

Boy1: I don't tell them completely.

Boy2: We should not tell them completely.

Boy3: You keep it at heart.

Boy4: You should not tell them.

Boy5: You can tell but you should not let them know that is you.

Boy6: You just play with them, you don't tell. Tell them stories but not that one.

Boy7: For me, it is useless to tell someone because if you tell them anything about that, they will definitely know it is you.

Boy8: It is not important to tell people because they are going to tease you with it.

Boy9: Fire is fire. If it means boxing each other then we box. Because for me if they are teasing, I fight.

Boy10: You make yourself comfortable by playing.
**Boy11:** You tell stories which are concerned about people in captivity but they will not know it's you.

**Boy12:** It's not important to tell any of them because some of the people definitely will know you are the one.

Those without fathers avoid the topic when it is raised in class or by their peers. Physical scars from the bush are explained as the result of an everyday accident. Alternative stories about their pasts are sometimes given. These performances of ‘passing,’ along with the list above, provide the children with some protection from stigmatization and allows them to employ agency in their relationships when they would otherwise be constrained.

Social passing is a concept most frequently applied to performances of gender and/or race. Passing suggests the acting or impersonation of a persona “as if one is someone or something one is not” (Fordham, 1993, p. 3), which involves “the careful masking of ambiguity” (McClintock, 1995, p. 65). Anne McClintock (1995) presents the term in her exploration of race, class, and gender passing in the colonial context. She argues that “passing” has been used in a pejorative, disempowering way in “heterosexual progress narrative” (McClintock, 1995, p. 68). She embarks instead to reveal a more nuanced and ultimately empowering genealogy of the exercise, as a means of colonial subversion, or more simply as a means of power subversion. Others have referred to this practice as “identity work” (Snow & Anderson, 1987), referring to Goffman's (1963) notion of the “management of spoiled identity.” This work involves the control of information about one's identity. In this case, the children employ strategies to pass as children who were born 'here'.

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81 Fordham (1993) provides an example of gender and racial passing. Russell et al. (1992) provides numerous examples of racial passing.
In schools, the stigmatization experienced by children born into the LRA results from an effort to police norms against the imagined threat that the children embody. Schools are rife with opportunities for their identities to be revealed. Passing allows the children to engage in the positive meaning making process with their peers in which schools are places of hope for a better future. In other words, passing allows them to negotiate more meaningful and positive social and academic experiences at school.

Representing the particular fear around being identified in school, one boy explained that his maternal family (his primary caregivers) decided it was best for him if they struggled to finance his education alone to allow him to remain unidentified as a child born into the LRA:

In the first place some NGOs wanted to help me, but at that time things were not good so they (maternal family) were scared for me because if you get NGO sponsoring you… you get exposed. Once you get exposed you start having problems and what. So they just decided it's better they do it alone.

As Daniella Daisy’s story reveals, getting access to school through sponsorship with an NGO does not guarantee the meaningful educational experience they seek. The concerns about becoming identified through sponsorship played out at Daniella Daisy’s school. Her mother is an orphan with no extended family and her father is deceased so she has no family support to draw on like the boy above. Her only way to get to school was through sponsorship. Her story reveals how she negotiates her context in a way that allows her to optimize her school experience with the resources she has. She shared how she avoided a particularly stigmatizing school practice by refusing to be publicly identified as a beneficiary of an NGO known to mostly or exclusively sponsor children born into the LRA. At her school lunch, different coloured cards were handed out to the children sponsored by NGOs – a teacher would call out the name of the NGO and have those sponsored children line up together. The name of the organization was
Mego Help, *mego* means mother and ‘help’ is ‘*kony*’ in Acholi. “Now like if it reaches lunch, so the person who calls the names says Mego Help and then [other] children start shouting that ‘Mego Kony! Mego Kony!’” Daniella Daisy found a way to avoid the stigma: “They call names of all the cards, then I say I want mine (after all the cards have been handed out).”

By refusing to be publicly identified through the lunch program, she was able to continue passing as a child who was born ‘here’.

The children whose fathers are top commanders still at large hide a more serious identity. They conceal the fact that they were born 'there,’ but they also must keep secret the specific identities of their fathers. Timothy said that some of his peers say his father is [commander], but he replies: “No, my father is not [commander].” One boy explained that he has never in his life revealed his or his father’s identity to anyone, not even his closest friend:

[Concealing my identity] was the number one thing. I have friends, it was the number one. First of all, I do not trust how they would react. I have some friends, they cannot keep secrets. I’ve kept this for a long time! For a long long time I have not told anyone, people don’t know. I’ve been having friends, they don’t know. Even my best best friend I studied with about seven years. No, more than eight years. I haven’t told him, he doesn’t know. He’s my good friend. Because I don’t trust his reaction, how he would react. So I need to put a lot of things into account before I even tell him.

Prudences, who is in boarding school outside the Acholi sub-region explains that she avoids talking about the war as a strategy to keep her identity secret: “Some [classmates] even they discuss [my father] in class, but I don't discuss… In the wartime, I tell them I was not there.”

Clarissa, who is also in boarding school outside the Acholi sub-region similarly commented that she avoids the topic altogether when it is raised, “Sometimes if they bring that topic up I

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82 In my conversation with another school administrator who deals with this organization at his school, I got the sense that there is very little effort to accommodate the challenges faced by children born of war. I cannot say, however, if this was the case at this particular school or not.
always change the topic so they don't get the chance of asking me those questions.” If they question her, she said, “I just stay quietly... [or] I tell them I was born in Kampala. I don't know,” to imply she knows nothing about the war.

Learning to hide his identity, explained Ian Anzo in 2016, helped him feel integrated into his community and not like an outsider whom people would want to harm: “That thing also made me fit into the community… It also made me to feel like a human being in the community… [I]t made me know how to live in [the] community, through covering my identity… Yeah, that made me to also save my life from other people.” Nevertheless, he then reflects that while he can sometimes feel like a human being, dano adana, he believes that keeping his identity secret is ultimately unsustainable. In 2014, he expressed fear for his life if his father (a top commander) is captured or killed. The only way to ensure his security, was to keep his identity secret which he concluded meant he would have to leave Uganda:

What I know is that most of the children of this terrorist, after maybe sometime they may begin to trace for the children of the big man. Maybe if accidentally he is caught they will look for all his children and kill them along with him, just the way it happened to those of Bin Laden and so on. So, for me, what I want, I want to study fine. After studying, I want to go and live in a country where people can't identify me easily to avoid all that problem. So I will work for money from there and then I will come and support, visit my mom. So, I just want to live in a country where no one can identify me.

If his father is captured, he explained, “[W]hat I will do is I will reduce my movement, control my movement very much and I will not talk much. I will stay at home and be quiet.” His statements reflect the strain of constantly having to conceal his identity in his everyday life. He wishes to “avoid all that problem,” inferring the problem of having to keep his identity secret, or perhaps the more ominous problem of dealing with the consequences of his identity being revealed.
In 2016, he reiterated his concerns:

I know when they capture [my father], they will look for the children. UN or what, they will look for the children. That is what I fear most… That is the thing I fear. And when they now know my identity, I [am] deceiving them. I feel very bad. And some of them they even told me what this LRA has done to their parents, maybe their uncles, aunts. But for me, I'm just pretending. That's why I feel uncomfortable, like in Gulu especially. Once they know that thing, maybe I will be left alone - with no friends… And some of them they talk badly on LRA. Some of them they talk badly and they even wish to know one of the children to be like almost to fight with them… Let me say, I don't hate Uganda, I like it, but I don't want people to know my identity. To save my life.

Ian Anzo believes his identity is a serious liability. He acknowledges the limits of passing - in terms of its efficacy (his concealment is always precarious), his social life (he could be left alone without friends because of his deceit), and even his existence (he fears people will want to hurt him when they learn his identity). Passing, he suggests, involves deceit, which reveals his concerns about the ethical nature of the practice. Outside Uganda, he contends, he would not have to “pretend” and deceive anyone - he would not have to engage in this performativity, which is consuming, but he could instead practice authenticity (Caughie, 1999).

5.3 Prayer: 'Praying Unties Your Heart'

In Chapter Four, I presented church as a place of refuge and comfort for the children in this study. Their positive attachments to church extend to the act of prayer. Religion and prayer offer the children a valid narrative into which they can insert themselves. Positioning themselves as one of God’s legitimate children and through the act of prayer, the children negotiate access to self-esteem and a sense of security (see Figure 34).
Many mothers reflect on their pasts and their children's pasts within a religious framework. Often, they see their children who were born in the bush as a divine gift. The children also understand their lives within this framework, giving thanks to God for protecting them and allowing them to transition safely. As Authar stated, “I think it's very important for us to pray because prayers they really helped most of us, the children, in the past. So we always have to be thanking God for how He protected us.” Idro similarly said,

I should thank God for what he has done to keep me up to today together with my mom. Because back in the bush, there you could die at any time. But now since God kept you and brought you to a good place so you have to thank Him and ask Him to continue protecting you.

Believing that God saved them provides a story into which they can insert themselves. Witnessing and surviving so much suffering and loss while in the bush has given them examples
of what they consider to be God's work that inspire their ongoing relationships with religion.

Authar shared an example of how his past informs his current religious dedication:

[T]here was a time when we were still in the bush. Then, my mother went away with some soldiers of my dad. And for us, we had remained home. So you know my father could know if something bad was going to happen. So he said, “Soldiers from the government are coming so we have to be careful now.” It did not take long. I don't know what happened, our father disappeared with his soldiers. For me I was with some boy... Then all of a sudden we saw planes coming and the government soldiers coming and they started shooting. So we ran, me and [that boy I was with], and we hid under some very small leaves. But when we stopped there, these soldiers, the government soldiers would come and run there and a very big bomb was thrown just in front of us and heaps of soil came out of that hole. But still, God protected us. They never saw us and they never shot us. So we should thank God.

Not always obvious to those around them, some of the children experience significant internal distress related to past memories from their time in the bush. The pain of these difficult memories is often compounded by more current challenges, such as abuse by stepfathers, poverty, or quarrelling from peers or caregivers. Prayer and going to church is used as a kind of meditation and moral compass. When asked why he drew a church, Emmy said it helps him to forget the stresses related to his past: “When you pray… it makes you feel good and you forget that thing.” Emmanuella reflected in similar ways how prayer helps to relieve her from her painful memories: “Praying unties your heart from bad things which you think of.”

More than using prayer and church as a means to stay in the present moment and not dwell on the past or life’s stresses, the children find comfort and guidance through listening to the teachings: “Praying, you know the church when you have gone there, you hear some good talks concerning teachings.” Julius similarly found social guidance, order, and clarity despite the seeming chaos of his life, “[I like going to church] because they talk good things from there. Like they say when you are home you should respect big people.”
Prayer offers an opportunity to reflect, to dream, and most importantly to hope. Asking God for things that can only be wished for, such as school fees, is common. This strategy is most frequently employed by the children in the most dire situations of poverty and with the least amount of family support. “When exams are coming, I pray,” said one boy while another explained that, “If you want something, you pray for it, for me and for other people.” Junior described how he prayed: “You close your eyes, you bend your head down, then you talk to God, you tell him what you want.” After successfully completing P7, Emmanuella told her mother they must fast for a week so that God would answer their prayers and help them find the money for school fees.

Also with no extended family to look to for support, Idro wrote in her journal, “And if God could help me, He could see the way I am suffering. He [would] help me so that I get somewhere where I can stay in peace.” Further in her journal, she begs for an answer from God but settles in her faith that He will provide:

And my mother was abducted when she was in P2, and from there she grows from there, and gave birth to two of us, and after returning back she is still suffering with us, so why God not to help her and right now as I write this I feel like to hung or kill myself because being me is not nice... I can ask myself that ‘Why is God real punishing me like that?’ … Although my thought is telling me that I can encourage myself that, ‘With God everything is possible.’ If God could help me so that someone could buy for us land where I can stay with my mother and our children.

In her faith, Idro finds comfort, as do many of the other children. Through their faith and the act of prayer, the children negotiate a delicate belonging.

5.4 Claiming Rights: ‘Arise and Defend Your Rights!’

“I want the world to know that we are the future.” (Emmy)
Child rights have a complicated place in Acholi society. The proliferation of the idea of child rights (see Chapter Three) coincided with the generational breakdown of Acholi communities due to mass displacement (Rosenoff Gauvin, 2013). With a weakened generational structure and the institutionalization of child rights within government and schools, which was strongly reinforced by NGO policy, along with the fact that many mothers live outside the traditional family structure, the children's cultural identities are thus constructed in conjunction with the discourse of the “universal” child. As a result, the children's claims for their rights is as much a reference to the global discourse as it is to the traditional process of earning personhood status. The children’s common statement, “We are all the same,” thus becomes not only a call out to the nation and the international community for equality with for children but also a claim to their cultural place in Acholi society as 'becoming human.'

Some children negotiate the boundaries of their exclusion by insisting they ought to be treated like other Acholi children: “If there is giving something, they should divide it equally among the children,” Authar stated. Joshua shared a similar sentiment of equality, “We should be treated the same way as other children. For example, we should not be given too much work, work that is extreme.” “We need to be treated equally,” Emmanuella insisted. Adding emotional equality, she continued, that they should be treated equally “by loving us the same way like the other children.”

When asked to draw themselves as an adult who was born ‘here’ and an adult who was born ‘there’, Daniella Daisy invoked her hardships as an orphan (her father was killed in the bush) and the child of an orphaned mother. As someone who was born in captivity, she drew herself as a poor woman selling food that does not bring much money in the market, but she
drew herself as a professional woman who helps orphans if she had been born 'here'. In reference to her drawings, she explained:

I drew a poor but hard working woman, she is selling things tomatoes, cassava and peas because she is not educated because there was not enough money to pay fees. [If I were born ‘here’ I W]ould be a rich woman, who has studied and constructed an orphanage and children playing at the orphanage. The orphanage takes care of street children and orphans. I am now here going to the market to buy for the children things.

The children often referred to their absent fathers as key reasons for their suffering. They insist that if they had been born ‘here’, their father would be with them, supporting them and they would be doing well. Daniella Daisy’s drawing of her as a professional woman, therefore, suggests that she would have had the support of both parents had she been born ‘here’. The significance of this is stressed when she as a professional woman is caring for and providing for orphans who do not have their parents. Daniella Daisy’s mother also grew up as an orphan with no extended family. As a professional woman, she would ensure that orphans could access a good life, which include education, play, and care. Since the fathers of many of the children died, they often spoke about their troubles in terms of being an orphan. Joshua referred to having rights as an orphan (his father died in the bush), “I'm hoping for the future that the rights of orphans should not be disturbed.”

Beyond claiming their rights as Acholi children, the children also make claims for their rights as children to access education. GUSCO established “Child Rights Clubs” as part of its programme of psycho-social practice and this is where the children were first introduced (Kids Talk, 2007, p. 73). As explored in Chapter Three, due to the government's expressed commitment to child rights, the children have been further introduced to their rights in school and through community programs by various organizations. Below is a section of a poem written
by Idro in her journal. In this poem, she makes a clear statement of her claim to her rights, exemplifying how the notion of rights is central to her claims as a human:

**Poem the Title Education**

Arise and defend your rights  
Arise up and fight for your rights.  
A right to parents at home.  
To be protected and care for.  
Above all, a right to Education.

The key for better life  
and bright future.  
Here there is no  
discrimination. Girls and boys are equal  
lame or poor there's an  
opportunity wheather [sic] it  
being blind or deaf  
there is chance.

Let all children go to school.

Within this poem, Idro makes a clear statement of her claim to her rights - children’s rights to have your parents, to be safe, to experience no discrimination, and most significantly to get an education. In the above poem on education, Idro insinuates the incrimination of the government for failing to uphold these rights, which has prohibited her from attaining her ambitions. Her statement that children should fight for their right to have parents at home refers to her longing to have her father in her life, but simultaneously invokes the responsibility to the government whose military forces killed him. Idro’s father is said to have been killed by the UPDF in the bush. Notably, in another poem she highlights the denial of her right to have
both parents: “Being that my father is not there I am being denied our rights ie. [sic] Rights to know my parents.” In the above poem on education, “To be protected and cared for” suggests this is the role of parents but it may also be an attribution of responsibility to the government to keep the nation’s children safe, unlike what happened to her mother in which formerly abducted mothers feel as though the government failed to protect them from being abducted.

The children referred most commonly to their right to education, and their right to the promise of education. The inability to secure school fees is experienced as unjust exclusion based on their pasts, for which they had no control. Education signifies the only opportunity to avoid the reproduction of their current poverty as they move into adulthood - it is the means to securing a future as men and women so they can then fulfil their socio-cultural expectations to care for their parents, marry, own land, and raise families. Ian Anzo’s drawing (in response to the prompt to draw the most important places in their lives) illustrates this significance: “I drew a picture of myself and a school. I drew a school because school gives me hope. When I study I know I will be fine.” Perhaps stressing its importance in his life, school was the only place he drew (see Figure 35):
The children call out to the international community to claim their right, as a “universal” child, to access education: “I think maybe if you can you should go and tell those people to support us in things like school fees and so on,” Innocent insisted. “What we have been saying is that if possible you go out and you tell the people, you put for them what we have been saying here. You push for them to see, also.” This request was unanimous among all the children. “I want the world to help the children born in the bush through their education,” was just one of many similar statements.

Even though Universal Primary Education was officially instituted in Uganda in 1997, based on the promise it would fuel national economic growth (or 'education for development'),

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83 While the discourses of neoliberal agendas celebrate inclusion, differences are nevertheless categorized and such children are constructed as not-normative. Disability scholar Dan Goodley (2016) critiques the neoliberal core of contemporary education. The normative child is the preferred child whom is included in neoliberal society as a vessel of neoliberal ideals. Meanwhile, the non-normative child in a usual competitive education context in capitalist systems is categorized as taking scarce space and resources from normative children and also reducing the value and prestige of their education. This attitude is reflected in the experiences of the children in this study when their identities are known.
many children are still unable to meet the actual costs of going to school (Cheney, 2007, p. 84-85). Not living with or even being connected to their paternal and sometimes maternal clans means that the children miss out on important cultural learning necessary for them to become full participants in their society and culturally, fully human. Their claims for their right to education, therefore, represents the only alternative means to achieving full participation in society and to belong, to actually be “the same.” Thus, from a more fundamental place, what they are claiming is less about their rights from a human rights perspective and more about their right to be treated as active participants in the everyday life of their society.

5.5 Conclusion: ‘I’m Like Others’

“Right now, what I can tell you is that I’m a good person. I’m like others when I'm at school.” (Prudences)

Navigating toward a better future requires that the children negotiate better positions in society. Claiming their rights as children, the children insist they are legitimate bearers of rights. Recognizing the structural limits of their social locations, by calling out the rights they have had violated, they place responsibility in the hands of the government and international communities. They draw on their rights to access a better life. They also use prayer to access their aspirations and to help them grapple with life’s daily challenges. As children of God, they see themselves deserving of equal opportunity. Beyond religion, however, the children employ strategies to conceal their identities. Social passing, like ‘forgetting’, helps to distance themselves from their identities and pasts. Not all the children have painful memories about their
time in the bush, but for those who do, forgetting is also a key coping mechanism necessary to carry on.

Primarily, their negotiations represent efforts to move beyond the limits of their identities and histories. There is a precariousness in each of these strategies, which is rooted in the nature of negotiations, however - they involve other parties. While they are individuals navigating toward better positions in life, their capacity to sustainably occupy those positions is hampered by attitudes and structures beyond their control. Negotiations are relational in nature and involve acting within the constraints of one’s social environment. As Unger (2008) explains, children may have the capability to achieve better positions, but sometimes “it is the child’s environment which lacks the resilience to negotiate with the child and provide what is needed” (p. 225). Despite being blanketed as children born into the LRA, the children are individuals with unique experiences, resources, and personal strengths. Their many negotiations in this chapter demonstrate the children’s desires for better lives and their innovative negotiations to try to achieve them. While some of the children may be able to move beyond the limits of their unique social environment, most relay their frustrations about the lack of necessary support and opportunity as they move into adulthood.

As vulnerable war-affected children, the participants are easily characterized simply as victims in international discourse. Locally, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, the concern is that they are narrowly and negatively constructed as rebel children. By centering the experiences of the children, this chapter illuminates their negotiations as evidence of their agency as political and social beings. This recognition of their capacity to act in their best interest while acknowledging the limitations they face responds to the call for the reconceptu-
alization of children born of war from symbolic identities to agents (McEvoy-Levy, 2007; Carpenter, 2007). Writing about children born of war and the culture of human rights, Siobhan McEvoy-Levy (2007) boldly argues that repositioning them as agents has the potential to encourage social tolerance and reconciliation in postwar contexts. More prudently, this positioning can reveal meaningful ways to support children born of war as they navigate their lives toward a better future.
6. The Everyday as a Child Born into the LRA: David’s Story

In this chapter, I present the story of one boy in the study, David. Life stories as narratives pieced together with knowledge generated from multiple methods to provide explanatory and contextual information (Clark-Kazak, 2006). David’s story is such a narrative, constructed by drawing together bits of interviews with multiple people and parts of David’s contributions in research activities. Through an in-depth look at his story, this chapter offers a further illustration of the local politics of belonging introduced in Chapter Four as experienced by a child born into the LRA. His story also reveals his efforts to negotiate with the forces and structures shaping his life, as explored in Chapter Five.

Broadly speaking, a single person’s narrative offers an awareness of the individual in society (Elliot, 2005). In her book about the lives of women who lived with the LRA for multiple years, many of them mothers of children born there, Baines (2016) demonstrates the value of life stories to help us understand complex social contexts and relations. In another example, Baines and Stewart (2011) present the life story of one formerly abducted woman to offer “a critical understanding of the broader political structures that have identified her as not dano adana, in her status as a non-person within her community and state” (p. 15). Clark-Kazac (2006; 2007) suggests that, while the young refugees in her study share some commonalities, a singular life stories offers insights into themes that arose in her research, such as the relational nature of vulnerability.
Similarly, David’s story is not meant to represent an essentialized experience of children born into the LRA. Rather, his narrative offers examples of the how forces and structures interact with his identity to produce his experiences of exclusion. Only through the detail offered by the singularity of one story can the significance of certain issues be understood. I chose David’s story in particular for how it illuminates with richness the way several of these issues, such as the relationship to land, spiritual affliction, stigma, and access to education, can be experienced from the subject position of a child born into the LRA. Another important reason for choosing his story is that it takes place in each of the three important places in which the children have described experiencing exclusion. As such, the narrative provides insights into symbolic role of the children in processes of place-making.

This chapter explores how David’s past and identity interact with the various power dynamics he encounters and how he experiences them. Through his story we see how the everyday experiences of children born into the LRA and their efforts to negotiate the forces shaping those experiences can be understood as not only situated in interpersonal or local relations of power, but also connected to the macro-level political project of belonging in which the Acholi are marginalized.

**6.1 David: ‘I Feel My Past Really Ruined My Life’**

**6.1.1 David’s Early Life**

David is a very tall, slender boy. According to his mother, David was born in Sudan in 1996 during a relatively sedentary period for the LRA. She was abducted when she was 13 years old and gave birth when she was 16. David was his mother’s first born. His father was a Major in
the LRA who died just four days after he was born, before David’s mother even learned the name of his father’s home village: “The home of his father, the father never told me, but his escort said he was from Lira District. But I cannot even trust that information.” In 2006, however, she had a breakthrough, only to lose hope again:

There was some white people (doing research) who came with some doctor from [Lira]. So when they came to this home, the women from the bush gathered here. So the doctor kept on asking us you, when you were in the bush you were whose wife? So, after we mentioned it all, when I said mine, he said, “Yes, I think I know the family, where his family is because the mother to that man who was your husband is my aunt.” So that same doctor was the one who went and told that old woman and that old woman came… We went to Concerned Parents (CPA). I went with David as well. So when we reached there we found the old woman there… So what happened is now from there they told her this is your daughter in law, and this is your grandson… So what the old woman said is that she would go back, because she's already not with her husband, she's already at her family's place (separated/divorced) so she will go back and then sit down with her brothers and they will see what they could do because the counsellor, the woman counsellor who was getting us from here said that this child needs to be supported, they need to pay school fees, they need to give the rest of the things to make the child grow well. So she said she'd go back and she would come back. But when she went, she never came back. [I was] referred back to CPA, there was some officer who was there but that big person also had left CPA and he was the one who had contacts to those people's family. So the phone number was given (for the big person) [it] was not also going through, so I got frustrated.

Not knowing his father’s identity is a missing link in David’s life and denies him access to a home clan and land. The consequences of this will be explored shortly.

After David’s father died in battle, his mother was forced to marry another man and went on to have one more child in the bush. Unbeknownst to her, her new husband had HIV and when she returned with her two sons, she and David’s younger brother tested positive. The boy died shortly after they returned from malaria-related complications exacerbated by HIV. David often misses his brother, knowing he would be able to relate with him, “He went so early. If
he was still there, at least we would be two of us so each one of us would advise the other because we would know very well where we came from, we would know our past.”

6.1.2 Poverty

In addition to losing her son, David’s mother has experienced significant hardships since returning. Poverty is a constant feature of their lives. Commenting on just one of the injurious aspects of the poverty so common among formerly abducted mothers, James the social worker highlighted endless struggle exemplified by David’s mother. “Intelligence depends also on the environment,” he explained as he considered school performance problems of children born into the LRA within a critique of child development and poverty.

If you don't have a stimulating environment, definitely you don't develop that intelligence. In good families, a child plays with a toy and what have you, but these families of these women who are struggling through this informal sector selling vegetables and what have you. Most of the time they are there, they come home, they have no time even to talk to the child, to have a conversation.

Reflecting the hard work with minimal returns that James refers to, David’s mother explained how important it was that David finds work during his holiday. It was not only his education that depended on it, but also the whole family:

Because sometimes, we don't have enough money to get the basics because I lost my job. So now he says that it won't be good for him to just sit. So he decided to go out to do some work so that when maybe we don't have things like soap and so on, he can help with that. Because for me I can go out to sew (looking for small jobs) but when I come back, I come back without money.

Despite her health being sometimes fragile from having HIV, David’s mother’s biggest concern was her lack of income. She had three other children to feed and send to school, all of whom were born after she returned from captivity. For years she had worked as a tailor for an
NGO making bags that were sold online and abroad in boutiques. However, because northern Uganda has been officially considered post-conflict since 2007, interest and funding for many of the NGOs was waning due to “donor fatigue” (Biehl & Locke, 2010). Many women who had been abducted and forced into marriages in the LRA had missed out on their educations and had few skills to earn them a livelihood. Upon returning from the bush, many women received training as tailors and were subsequently hired by one of the many NGOs at a time when Gulu’s economy was based almost entirely on foreign aid and the humanitarian (Branch, 2008). These jobs, while often precarious and without benefits or leave policies, allowed the women to provide most of their children’s basic needs. By 2014, however, humanitarian organizations were pulling out, leaving many of these mothers without means to support their families (Odokonyero, 2013).

With the loss of her job and her fragile health, David’s mother worried about her son and how she could support him. He has to rent his own tiny hut because it is not acceptable for a boy his age to sleep where his mother sleeps. He is a very tall, strong boy who needs a great deal of food. She also has her other children to worry about. When she returned, she had hoped she would find security and respect by marrying a man. Each of her three other children who were born after she returned were fathered by different men. Each man had promised to take care of her and her children but none of them cared about David, in particular. “Because you get married with this man,” she explained, “You stay thinking that he will accept you with your child with whom you came, but then again when things do not work out you try another person. So it's just all difficult.”

Each one of her three husbands after their transition out of the bush had treated David poorly:
They (ex-husbands) knew very well that David was born from there and they never liked him at all. They never really wanted to waste their time to teach him. They would even tell me they don't care because he's nothing to them. So that is one thing which made me not find a good place to settle. Because if you don't like my child, with whom I suffered so much, then I cannot be comfortable living with you. I have to leave you and get another place to live. So like that, that is why I kept moving from one place to another. Because I thought I would get a better place, someone who would comfort me and I would stay with that person well with my child.

Referring to their frequent moving, David longs for the stability he imagines his own father would bring to his life. A home, a stable place, David explains, is necessary for a good life:

I feel the past has affected my life, especially on the issue of where I should live. If the things which happened did not happen the way they did, I would not be living in different places and switching places, the home here we are always switching. We live fast, even when you try to settle somewhere. Like prayers when you're eating food, you do it so fast. So if my father was there, maybe he could have put us somewhere to settle in a home. So I feel my past really ruined my life.

Like Idro who suggested the only solution was to rewrite history whereby her mother does not get abducted, in this statement David also suggests that if “the things which happened did not happen the way they did” life would be better. If he had his father, his missing link, he would have a clan and a home with land on which they could settle and live from.

### 6.1.3 Land

Longing for a place to settle, David reflects on why this is not possible in his life. He has been close to his maternal family, but as his mother explained in 2014, there was little value in this for him. “I worry a lot because of a family thing,” she explained. “One, because at my father's place there is no land now. I can't even find his (David’s) father's home, and I'm not working.
I worry about what will happen when he becomes a man.” If he knew where his father’s village was, or better yet, if his father were there with him, David feels he would be ok:

Because I'm finding some difficulties now because I don't have anywhere to live. Where my mom is staying she's also renting. It's difficult for me now, I don't have anywhere to stay… I feel that if maybe my father was there, he could get for me a place, a home at least to stay. But now he's not there. That is why I think so much that my future is not there… I think maybe if even it's not that kind of land inheritance, at least if my father were there he could maybe try and get us a plot somewhere where we live as a family there. Or if he fails to buy that one we go for their communal land back in their village. And then we stay at his home there.

As they traditionally belong to their father’s family, a child’s paternal village is considered their ‘home.’ Boys traditionally inherit land at this home, through their fathers. This land inheritance is meant to provide security and potentially a homestead for the boy as a young adult and his wife. Land can be inherited through the maternal lineage on rare occasions (Baines & Rosenoff Gauvin, 2014), but as several of the mothers in the project found, such claims are often fiercely contested by male relatives. The Constitution of Uganda and the Land Act insists that women have equal rights to land, but the mass displacement during the war weakened the authority of extended kin relations and left lineages impoverished. As a result, such alternative arrangements that deviate from the cultural norm have become rare (Baines & Rosenoff Gauvin, 2014; Whyte et al., 2012).84

“My family sold off all the land,” explained David’s mother, “So when [David] becomes a man, where should he go with his wife?” Her father only had daughters, “He sold all the land because he said he had no son and he sent my mother back to her family. He had two sons and

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84 Adam Branch (2014) suggests that male disempowerment in terms of cultural and family authority and leadership has led to an increased assertion of coercive male authority, justified within a context of reviving Acholi culture.
three girls but both boys died.” Proscovia interjected, “But your sons are also his!” David also believed he should inherit land from his maternal grandfather: “My problem is from my grandfather who misbehaved. He sold off the land where I needed to stay.”

It seems that David’s grandfather had succumbed to alcoholism, a common symptom of displacement and poverty among men in northern Uganda, related to the infantilization of the Acholi outlined in the previous chapter. Dolan (2002) posits that when life options are taken away from men and social expectations are impossible, the social authority of civilian men is undermined. The resulting “feelings of fear, intimidation, humiliation, frustration and anger, which are often expressed in violence against self and others, in the forms of alcohol abuse, suicide attempts and domestic violence, and also in conflict between civilians and military” (Dolan, 2002, p. 11). “My father sold all the land and drank all the money so David is just here,” stated his mother in 2014. David felt he would make a good farmer, but since he had no access to land, his mother hoped he could continue his education. That is why at the end of 2015 he travelled to his maternal village to find work so he could raise the funds necessary for him to continue - what both he and his mother see as his only path to a livelihood.

6.1.4 Spiritual Problems

David’s daily life has been disrupted by other problems he and his mother believe are related to his past. In 2014, he reported headaches where his eyes would turn red and he had trouble sitting still. “It started long ago when he was still young,” his mother explained, “When we had just returned, they took us to the paramount chief (ker kal kwero). They did a ritual called
moyo piny. They said nothing more would happen, but that thing continued.” David recalls it differently,

When we had just returned (from captivity), I used not to enjoy staying near people. All the time, I would feel like I needed to be just by myself… at first I was a very rough child. Then later when we were brought at the palace of the paramount chief (ker kal kwaro), so we stepped over the egg and slippery branch (nonyo ton gweno), and then after that I also started cooling down in my actions, I was not very rough. And then also what I remember I think a week after the ceremony, sometimes if I sat I would just begin to cry so seriously. But later on all those things went down and I got numb.

Figure 36 A journal entry by David.
This is what he saw while in the bush, he explained, revealing the kind of scenes of death he encountered as a young child. His spirit is said to be attached to spirits of people who died in such situations.

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85 A ritual to cleanse an area, involving the sacrifice of a sheep by Elders to chase away spirits of the dead (Liu Institute, 2005; Baines, 2010).
86 A cleansing ceremony, traditionally used to welcome home a family member after a long absence. The ceremony was used for returnees and former LRA commanders as of 2003 (Liu Institute, 2005).
87 Notably, sexual conduct outside of marriages in the LRA was strictly forbidden. Porter (2016) explores this topic and references this drawing in her discussion about the reports of rape by LRA fighters outside of the forced marriages.
Nevertheless, problems returned and David reported disturbances during P5 and P6 that he believed were spiritual: “My mother told me that in our past when we walked a lot in the bush, we walked even in bad places, places where people had died (see Figure 36). Maybe I walked over the bones of a dead person. So probably spirits caught me.” In Acholiland, “spirits of people who died violently” (Finnström, p. 159) can enter a person’s body. The spirit manifests as cen, which haunts the person in a variety of ways, including mental illness, sickness, and nightmares. 88 “Even in the night sometimes,” David disclosed, “When I'm supposed to be sleeping but I find myself up, I talk many things, but what I don't know… When I get up they (the others sleeping in the same hut) say I scream things that they don't understand.” In 2014, David described a painful incident he related to the cen disturbing him:

[O]ne time I sat during the day, then some thought came into my mind that I should go kick the table. So I went and kicked the table. So I hurt myself much. The whole of the skin was off so they took me to the hospital and stitched that part… It comes as a thought in my mind. It tells me, ‘Go, go now, just kick this table.’

Concerned, his mother again sought help: “Here, old people move to find what is happening to their children and their homes, they go see the ajwaka. 89,” she explained. “The ajwaka said it is the spirits of many dead people we passed on our walk back home (from Sudan to Uganda).” Cen, or “ghostly vengeance” as p’Bitek translates the term (cited in Finnström 2008, p. 159), is also known to bring misfortune to the possessed person’s family

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88 Cen is a spiritual phenomenon, most commonly considered to be the spirits of people who died a violent or wrongful death and/or who were not buried properly. Cen significantly disrupts social harmony (Porter, 2013). It must be cleansed in order to bring peace to those affected. Cleansing ceremonies are always social affairs that the family members and neighbours of the affected person, as well as Elders and often an ajwaka (healer/diviner/spirit medium). During the war, cleansing ceremonies were adapted to meet the needs of returnees and their families and neighbours. In some cases, such as David’s ceremonies were conducted at ker kal kwaro in groups.

89 The ajwaka is also referred to as a healer, diviner, and/or spirit medium (Porter 2013; Liu Institute 2005; Finnström 2008).
or sub-clan and is linked to the stigma returnees and children born in captivity face (Baines 2007; Liu Institute for Global Issues and Gulu District NGO Forum 2005; Stewart 2015). Traditional ceremonies are carried out to ‘chase away’ cen. The ajwaka she visited recommended David undergo a second cleansing ceremony involving the sacrifice of a goat: “So now what we need to do is separate his spirit with their spirits with a goat.” She did not, however, have the money to buy the necessary goat.

6.1.5 Curse

David has spent a lot of time at his maternal family village. The Acholi are a patrilocal, patrilineal society (Rosenoff Gauvin, 2010) whereby women move to their husband’s family’s land once married. In northern Uganda, children belong with their father’s family, not their mother’s. So while he believes no one outside of his extended family in the area was explicitly told about his past, his presence at his maternal home was nevertheless “an aberration of Acholi norms and a challenge to social harmony” (Porter, 2013, p. 245).

In 2016, David reported that he suspected some people may have cursed him. He had observed that “[p]eople’s actions towards me are different from actions which are done to other children.” I asked him for an example and he replied,

Even people from my maternal village - if I reach the village, my life changes immediately. Because sometimes you just see some people just come to abuse you, some people even in the neighbourhood, they stop their children from coming to stay with me, that I take marijuana, they say that I smoke that, that I drink alcohol. So many things. They say so many bad things about me.

David explained why he suspected he may have been cursed. “I have a feeling that that person (who gave the curse) is from my maternal family.” When his sponsorship ended, he had lived
with his maternal grandfather in his village for two years before his sponsorship in Gulu was reinstated. During this time, he said, his performance in school had been good, only that he did not pass the exams.

So when I was taken there, we were studying in the same class with my other cousins, we were living with them in the same homestead. But they were not very bright, I was better than them. So when we were studying, I don't know what started happening, my performance started going down. Slowly by slowly. Yes, teachers would come and teach, I would just sit in class, but I would not perform well. So I studied there for two years. I dropped in performance until I was in the same level as those children who were there before. So after two years I came back [to Gulu]. And after I came back here and started studying again, my performance went back to normal. So I have a feeling that maybe that is something that comes from there.

He felt the curse had transferred in some ways to his school in Gulu where the head teacher, who knew he was born into the LRA, seemed to not like him. He explained that he felt the curse was related because “even if something was not something serious, if it reached the head teacher, he would concentrate on it so much like it's a very serious issue. Once I am mentioned in it, he gets so focused on me.”

6.1.6 School

“When I returned (from the bush), I was in GUSCO,” explained David’s mother, “I had two children so they took my photo with my two children and I was told both children would be sponsored. But my other child passed away so I was left with only David. So they now took to sponsor him.” Sponsorship is when an NGO (and less commonly a private individual) pays part or all of a child’s school fees and in rare situations their requirements, too. Often an organization will have strict qualifications, which are meant to narrow the pool of potential beneficiaries and sponsorship is often targeted to groups of children who are deemed to be most
vulnerable, such as orphans and children born in captivity. Despite catering to children who live with significant challenges, sponsorship can be difficult for such children to maintain. “The biggest problem with them is if you fail a class they stop supporting you,” explained a head teacher where sponsored children are enrolled, reflecting little or no accommodation for the significant health and spiritual challenges the children may face. David himself had lost his sponsorship because he failed a class, but after his mother pleaded they began to sponsor him again two years later. His stories about stigmatization at school reveal how it can intensify other forms of violence.

There were a large number (+20) of students at David’s school who were born in captivity. The head teacher explained to me in an interview that he feels burdened by the children, implying they are particularly troublesome: “Most of the head teachers have been rejecting them because of their behaviour and I've got a lot of challenges by keeping them here. I was also taken to police many times over this issue these children.”

David recounts a particularly painful story, in which he demonstrates how the school administration discriminates against children born into the LRA. The stigmatizing attitudes and behaviour of teachers led him to feel as though he and other children born into the LRA were not welcome at the school:

Well, there was also one painful incident which happened when we were in P6. There is another CBC\textsuperscript{90} called Tony. So Tony had a watch. So, another boy in the class tried to borrow the watch from Tony.\textsuperscript{91} So Tony refused to give the watch to the boy. Some teacher of ours… came in class and said, ‘Tony come up here.’ He said, ‘Tony, why are you having tensions with this boy? Why are you fighting over this watch?’ So Tony said, ’It’s my watch, he tried to borrow it and I've refused.’ So now he said, ‘I wonder why you big people cannot learn how to behave. Can't you hear your voice is so deep?\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{90} CBC refers to children born in captivity. This acronym has become popular through the organization Watye ki gen, which works with many children born in captivity.

\textsuperscript{91} Pseudonym.
You cannot now keep on shouting here with this young boy. Now I want to show the whole class that you're big. Remove your clothes.' So he started removing the clothes of this boy. He removed the pants up to here. That he first has to show his private part to class to show the class he's already a big boy. So the boy started crying. So that thing was very painful for us (children born into the LRA). I got up and went to the head teacher and told the head teacher such and such a thing has happened like this. So he told me any issue that concerns us, the CBCs, he does not deal with it. ‘How can a teacher let a pupil remove his clothes? That is not something which can possibly happen.’ But even the pupils who were witness to what the teacher did, came and told the head teacher, but still he ignored it. So that was the time when we realized that we, the CBCs, we're not considered as important pupils in the school. We're just looked at as useless in the school.

In David’s story, the teacher said he wanted to show the other students that Tony was old and not a child. The implication was that Tony was older than the others because he was from the bush. “You big people” implies children born into the LRA because many of them began school when they were older than their peers. Referring to them in this way marks them as different. Then the teacher suggested that they, children born in captivity, “cannot learn how to behave,” which connects their identity with uncivilized characteristics that suggest savageness because they are implied to be untameable. David’s concerns were dismissed by the head teacher whereby the head teacher not only refused to believe him, but he also refused responsibility for the safety and protection of children born in captivity because of who they are. Confronted with this division constructed by the head teacher, David felt rejected, not only personally, but categorically as children born into the LRA. This part of his identity, this stigma, is a “master status” (Goffman, 1963) that devalues him as a whole. David experienced this rejection as an acceptance of their collective lesser value, concluding his story with his realization of their exclusion and his solemn acceptance of the boundary established by the head teacher.
Encompassed in this devaluation of children born into the LRA was a judgement about their intelligence. Once the head teacher brought David and another boy who had been born into the LRA into his office to beat them for not performing well. David’s mother explained that the other boy feared having his bum caned so he put his hands over his bum to protect it. The boy was beaten, however, “until some of the bones inside [his hands] were broken so his mother had to take him to the hospital.” David’s shorts got torn from the beating and he had to return home to have his mother sew them back together. That head teacher, explained his mother, “does not like children who were born from the bush… [H]e does not like them. And they always have this saying that all these children who were born from there, the smoke which comes from the bones, already spoiled their minds.” The head teacher described their poor performance to me in this way:

I think this is because of mental torture from in the bush. This coming to the NGOs (rehabilitation centres) with mental shifting, it has not shifted them properly. There are others that cannot reform fully. I know the torture in the bush is not something light. So it may not get off of the brain of these kids easily.

In this example, the head teacher assumes they have lower intelligence because they were born in the bush. Unsurprisingly, the teacher does not differentiate between the children who lived for some time in the bush and those who were conceived there but born in a rehabilitation centre.

Such stigmatization intensified existing inequalities for the children, such as having material consequences, as David experienced in 2015. During the holiday in which he was arrested, David had gone to the village to earn money for costs not covered by his sponsorship so he could begin secondary school: “I wanted to save those moneys to help me for going back to school. For buying requirements when the time for going back to school came.” Without all
of the requirements, children are not allowed to attend school. If he passed his primary exams, David was going to start senior school, where there would be a lot of requirements. At the time, he did not yet know if he had passed his primary exams. He had been absent from school in the weeks prior to the exam, which meant he missed much of the exam preparations.

Just weeks before the big final exams, David was forced to leave the school after the head teacher accused him of stealing money from another student: “[T]his is what is going to happen,” said the head teacher of his school, according to David. “You're going to take lunch. If by lunch time you've not yet got this boy's money or whoever stole it, you're going home. I'm chasing you home.” David returned two weeks later, after the actual thief had been identified, with only one week left to prepare for the exams. Such stigmatization questioned David’s moral character and assumed without proof that he was culpable.

6.1.7 Prison

After exams at the end of 2015, he headed to the village of his maternal grandfather where he often spent the holiday period between school terms. “I had gone to my maternal village, the way I normally went during holidays,” he explained. Something different happened this time, though. “So when I went there, I happened to get some work, which was at a construction site.” After working on a Saturday, he returned as usual to his grandfather’s to sleep. On Sunday he played a football game in a nearby village, that was part of a tournament. His mother called

92 The head teacher of a government primary school (part of the government’s declared “universal primary education”) disclosed the materials necessary to attend: “Requirements, these include both day and those in the boarding. They bring one broom, one soft broom, two rolls of toilet papers… The books, uniforms, shoes is to be bought by the parents. And for those in the boarding, the requirements, which includes the brush, the reams of paper.” Private schools, where the quality of education is considered to be significantly better, are known to have page-long lists of requirements for each of the year’s three terms.
that day and asked him to return to Gulu the following day, so on Monday he woke early to catch a vehicle travelling to Gulu.

I was entering the vehicle. Then some man called Ojok\textsuperscript{93}, he came to me and said, “Ah, my friend, are you going back home?” So I told him yes. So from there, he went and called some other \textit{boda boda}\textsuperscript{94} guys that I should be arrested. So he picked my luggage now from there. He collected all my things and said I should be arrested. I was not even hard to get, I just walked with them and went to police. Then from there they started beating me. The \textit{bodas} who were called, they started beating me. So when they were beating me they now started saying that I should say that I broke the casino and took the money.

 Apparently, a casino machine in a local bar had been broken and money stolen from it the previous night. Somehow, David was blamed. He still cannot understand why he was targeted. “I said I cannot say that,” he explained referring to the \textit{boda} drivers’ insistence that he accept guilt.

So the policeman there said I have to say that I did it so that they don't take me back to the other centre. If I want to be beaten more, they're going to take me. So they beat me from there, the policemen, the boda boda men, they were all beating me. So they dragged me, they wanted to bring me back to the centre, so I said yes I broke it. So they took me back inside. Inside the police, I stayed there for two days.\textsuperscript{95}

David was then transferred to Gulu prison before being shipped out the notorious Lugore work prison for several months before finally being released to his mother.

As I explained in my conceptualization of stigma, part of the stigma facing children is a belief that they have inherited their rebel fathers’ violent behaviour and immorality (Ladisch,\textsuperscript{93} Pseudonym \textsuperscript{94} \textit{A boda boda} is a popular and very commonplace motorcycle taxi. \textsuperscript{95} Both David and Proscovia agreed that had they transferred him to the other centre, where more people knew him, he would have been beaten to death - an incident of “mob justice” (Porter, 2013).
2015). David remains unsure if people in the village knew about his past and if that may have contributed to his arrest, but he suspects it is at least related to his curse:

I think it's related to the curse. Because if really that was something which happened, or I did, at least it would not frustrate me so much. But I did not do it and they claimed there are other three people (who were said to have done the crime with him). But those people were not even arrested (nor was he ever given their names). Maybe if I did not do that, at least those people were there, they were arrested, then we were all brought together. I would be in a position to ask, I could ask them a lot of questions, we could talk. But there was no other person apart from me. I was the only one arrested and that was all. So it surprises me up to now.

Once in custody, David’s age could not be established. Because he was born in bush, when he transitioned out with his mother, he never received a birth certificate. Many of these children did get a birth certificate when they were at one of the reception centres, but a “significant number” of the children do not since their nationality and paternal lineage are in question (Ladisch, 2015, p. 17). The magistrate ordered David’s teeth to be counted, but that only concluded he was older than 16. “So they said evidence should be collected from his school,” his mother explained, “So they went to school and picked the register book. In the register book, he was 17. But the exam ID said he was 16.” Without further evidence, he remained in custody.

At David’s first court appearance, a former landlord was present. The magistrate demanded, “Where is the father of this child?” The man replied, “That the father of this child died in the bush.” Considering the stigma attached to this status, this public identification had the potential of having the stigma impair his chances of a fair trial. David was then sent to Lugore, a large prison farm where inmates are subject to long hours of compulsory labour. In 2015, inmates at this prison were driven to protest against conditions and the amount of work, claiming the conditions caused their poor health (Monitor, December 22 2015).
The arrest happened at the beginning of January and senior school usually begins in February. His mother feared he would again lose his sponsorship if he did not get out in time to start school, because “what they said was, they cannot pay for someone in prison.” She borrowed 290,000 UGX (approximately $105 CND).

But the problem which was there, she really wanted me to come out in time so that I go to school. So she kept on borrowing little little bit of money from out so at least she could try. You know here in Uganda the system, you have to push things using money (bribe). So she wanted to push so that at least I would get out in time to start school. But it did not work out.  

The police took the money but did nothing, leaving her with a large debt. In April 2016, David was finally released from prison, with his mother standing as his surety. As of August 2016, David was not in school.

David experienced this whole incident with a constant feeling that it was related to his past. He was further reminded of his past at various points throughout this period, including when he lacked proper identification, when he had no father with him in court, when his mother struggled to get money to bribe the police for his release, and when he was unable to begin the new school year. Put another way, I suggest this incident illustrates the entanglements of the many forces at play in his everyday life.

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96 His mother borrowed a total of 290,000 UGX (approximately $105 CND), which was taken by the police. She now owes all the people she borrowed from.

97 A surety is someone who pledges to supervise an accused person.
6.2 Discussion

David’s experiences reveal the everyday forces constraining not only his life options, but those of most children born into the LRA. Like him, the children face problems with access to basic needs (such as food, clothing, soap, shelter), education, and land. Many cannot access the healthcare they require and some struggle with disabilities resulting from their time in the bush. “Missing links” - what Whyte et al. (2012) refer to as the human links who, if alive, would have mediated a connection to other relatives who could provide security and support - figure prominently in David’s story and those of other children born into the LRA. Without support beyond what his mother can provide, David struggles to navigate to a better position in life where he can provide for a wife and family in the future. Whether overt, implied, or simply perceived, stigma plays a large role in shaping how David experiences his life. I suggest that how he makes sense of his lived experiences reflect the workings of a local politics of belonging, which connects the children to a macro level politics of belonging. Revealing this connection situates the children born into the LRA into a national and international problem of accountability and responsibility with regards to the war in northern Uganda and makes clear that the belonging of the children matters beyond concern for the individual.

After his release from prison, David explained that he will likely not return to his maternal home. Despite his grandfather being a “drunkard,” as his mother described him, David had a good relationship with him. He was upset he did not give him land, but nevertheless David worked with him to plant and harvest the only “small garden” his grandfather had kept. David referred to that place as “home” and had spent a lot of time there, including the better part of two years when he had gone there to attend school when his sponsorship was revoked. While
it was not his ancestral home in the traditional sense where children belong to their paternal clan and village, it seems he felt he had claim to belonging there. The police incident, however, illuminated a dynamic of unwelcome:

Then with the incident which occurred on me, that has made me decide never to go back home. Because when I was arrested and brought to prison, only that cousin of mine, the girl, she was the only one that came and visited me. No one came and visited me. So if I look at the attitudes of people at home there, I feel like they don't think like I am someone important. So I don't wish to go back there.

His statement suggests that when no one came to visit him after his arrest and imprisonment, the true nature of the relationships upon which he claimed that place to be ‘home’ was forced to the foreground. While he had previously sensed resentment from some villagers, he had persisted with his participation in the relationality of social life in the village through fundamental activities of family and village life (planting, harvesting, returning on holidays). Feeling as though they do not think he is “someone important” suggests he senses being denied recognition as dano adana.

In writing about the political in stories of women who spent multiple years in the LRA, Baines (2016) explores the contestation of what it means to be a human being, to be dano adana, in the context of relations of violence. As I demonstrated in Chapter Four, children born into the LRA are constructed as embodiments of the immorality of the war and the violence that led to their conceptions. The stories of “complex victimhood” in Baines’ book draw out the meaningful negotiations in the social action that define one’s personhood - in the everyday social interactions and work dano adana is contested. It is also through these interactions that life is made meaningful. In her study on the return of a displaced family to their ancestral land,
Rosenoff Gauvin (2013) explains that personhood is actualized and life is made meaningful through the practices of their everyday activities.

Returning to David’s story, I suggest he negotiated his subject position through his relationships in the village by participating in key cultural activities to claim his place in the village as someone valuable, as *dano adana*. Despite his efforts, his sense of personhood was not reciprocated. In school, where he went to prepare himself to be a man who could one day fulfill his socio-cultural expectations and provide for his family, he similarly felt his value was challenged: “So that was the time when we realized that we, the [children born in captivity], we're not considered as important pupils in the school. We're just looked at as useless in the school.” His sense of being regarded as useless was evidenced and reinforced by the many instances in which he experienced discrimination for no other reason, as far as he could tell, than the fact he was born into the LRA. He senses that he is constructed as the other - unwanted and unwelcome, despite his best efforts to challenge assumptions. Probyn (1996) suggests that “be-longing” is a desire to become someone or something else. The boundary discourses and practices - the way the social fabric is rewoven - reflect normative and moral judgements that are informed by the social legacy of the violence endured, leaving David longing for the security of a home. A home, he explained, is a place where he can “live freely” with his neighbours, meaning where his personhood is not disregarded:

You don't have to pick money to hire for that place at the end of every month (rent). You will live so freely. No one can tease you and take you from that place. and also you can live freely with your neighbours because it's something you own, it's yours… I think my future can be fine if in case I find somewhere to live, like home or my land or something like that where if I go to school, I can leave my things in that home and then come back.
David reveals his longing for place-belongingness in his everyday life - no rent stress, interacting well with neighbours, and going to school. Having a home is belonging, being situated not only in place, but also in positive social relationships with others. Belonging like this would allow him to be a legitimate subject, a human being, not merely an object of fear and judgement (Jackson 2002). For now, however, he feels his “words and actions have no place in the life of the collectivity” (Jackson 2002, p. 45).

Such experiences of exclusion, I suggest, demonstrate how children born into the LRA are caught up in a local politics of belonging. Society is reconstituted after war through its relations - as suggested by the metaphor of reweaving of the social fabric. In its reconstitution, children like David encounter the boundaries drawn by the social relations in a place, keeping them marginalized and prohibited from belonging. “Where you belong is where you are safe” (Ignatieff 1994, p. 25). Feeling safe and secure are the positive feelings of belonging and in relation to place, this sense derives from “the comforting realization of others’ absence” (Dixon and Durrheim 2004, p. 459). In a society in the process of reweaving its social fabric, boundaries of inclusion/exclusion are actively (re)produced through everyday social relations and interactions in places. In this process of reconstructing places of safety where social harmony exists, children born into the LRA are pushed out and their negotiations to navigate toward a better position in the future fail to carry them there.

The connectedness that underlies Acholi culture and that is responsible for peaceful living, sees the behaviour of a person as a reflection of the morality of their community (Oloya 2013). Alternatively, when someone is rejected, or “cast out” (p’Bitek 1986), it is an act of moral judgment responding to a sense of broken social harmony. Returning to Porter’s (2013) work on Acholi responses to rape, she found that a wrongdoing is judged based on the level of
harm done to social harmony. The appropriate response is determined accordingly to restore social harmony. David’s best efforts to meaningfully contribute to the social relations at home or at school are judged not on his personal value but the value of what he represents.

Writing about the politics of storytelling in contexts of violence, Michael Jackson (2006) explains that stories can be told from the “borderlands that ordinarily demarcate different social domains, or that separate any particular social order from all that lies at or beyond its margins” (Jackson 2006, p. 25). David’s stories, told from a marginal social location, reflect the children’s efforts to constitute themselves as subjects. Constructed as an object representing immorality and violence, David speaks to this injustice. Jackson (2006) notes that being is a constant negotiation of encounters in which one is an actor while also being acted upon. David’s stories reflect his continuous struggle to actualize his personhood in his relationships and through his encounters. His negotiations for a balance of power in his relationships and interactions are efforts surmounted within a much wider context of broken social harmony, with roots as deep as colonialism. His efforts to mediate a reformulation of his public embodiment as an object of immorality and violence into a subject as a human being, *dano adana*, capture those larger political forces involved in the destruction of social harmony. Thus, I suggest that his intersubjective negotiations involve politics of belonging from the local through to the nation-state and beyond, illustrating the complexity of the space occupied by children born into the LRA within the reconstruction process.
7. Making a Sense of Self

The abducted girls and boys who were rescued, captured, escaped or released, returned home. Many of them had homes and families and villages into which they had been born. Memories of belonging, which fuelled longings for home, were a source of hope in difficult times (Amony, 2015). In contrast, children born in the bush did not 'return' like their mothers. They transitioned into a completely foreign landscape. They had no sense of home or with whom they belonged other than with their mothers, fathers, and extended LRA family (step mothers and half-siblings). In the bush, captives were forbidden to talk about home, so the children were not instilled with a sense of their parents' place of belonging – the home they culturally inherited through their parents. The children transitioned out of the war into a foreign social world deeply affected by decades of conflict related violence. This chapter explores how, in this context, the children in this study create a sense of self.

Telling stories construct a coherent narrative about who they are, developing a sense of self. This must involve recalling where they come from, and significantly their lived and remembered relationships. As I mentioned in Chapter One, responding to the statement by French Philosopher Jean Jaques Rousseau that “Man is born free,” Acholi scholar Okot p’Bitek

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98 Often when the abducted returned, they resided in one of the many squalid IDP camps. Their traditional homes and sometimes families were gone - either destroyed or displaced. In addition to the stigma they experienced, ‘returning home’ many captives were met with new hardship.

99 However, it is likely that some did secretly share memories of ‘home’.

100 The transition out of the bush – from 'there' to 'here' – was experienced by some as going from belonging to a family to a place where they had little or no claim to belonging. Junior, for example, had had parents who loved him and a younger brother he enjoyed playing with and suddenly in one day he lost it all and was taken to a foreign place (GUSCO) where no family claimed him as theirs for six months. To this day, he has been unable to confirm his mother’s identity and family.
(1986) challenges this individualistic Western model of personhood and argues, “Man is not born free” (p. 19). “The central question,” he continues, “‘Who am I?’ cannot be answered in any meaningful way, unless the relationship in question is known” (p. 20). p’Bitek goes on to explain the “relationality of social existence” (Rosenoff Gauvin, 2013) of Acholi society in which “it is by participation alone that life is made meaningful” (p. 26). The children’s stories of their everyday lived experiences (past, present, and future) exemplify this relationality as fundamental in their sense of who they are, as sites of meaning making in the process of negotiating personhood.

Stories are how people give meaning to their experience (Eastmond, 2007). Particularly in contexts of political violence, where the normative course of life is disrupted, stories can be reconstitutive by giving people a means to make sense of their experiences of violence and change. This chapter seeks to answer the research question, ‘how do the children make sense of their experiences?’ In this chapter, I situate the children’s stories as texts that offer insights into how they understand their lived experience in relation to the world around them and how they seek to affirm who they understand themselves to be. Shared through narration, poems, journal entries, and drawings, the children’s stories about their fathers, their mothers, extended family and siblings, and what they aspire to in the future were in response to questions about their everyday thoughts, feelings, and hopes.

The children make sense of themselves in relation to others and through their stories. The stories they tell about where they are from and who they are, weave themselves into the moral and social fabric of their communities. Their narrations, poems, journal entries, and drawings are texts that I interpreted often in correlation with each other (drawings, for example, were always interpreted along with the verbal explanation of each illustration), are a means with
which they represent their lived experience. Examining their stories gives insight into how they see themselves in relation to those around them and how they imagine themselves to be in the future. They tell these stories to create a coherent self, an Acholi child, also one who was or is loved by both parents and whose past and future legitimately fits into the reconstructed society of the Acholi people.

Popular rhetoric promotes a singular identity of these children as rebel children who embody social and cultural problems and who are prone to violence. This group identity is upheld by humanitarian agencies who categorize child survivors and promote such group identities, which assumes that this one dimension of their lives determines their post-war experiences. Jason Hart (2004) explains,

["T"]he age, gender, social class, personal history, religious faith, political views, and so on, of individual children are rendered irrelevant within discourses which suggest that a single dimension - be it ethnicity, nationality or the simple fact of being a refugee - overwhelmingly determines their experiences, values and aspirations. (p. 167)

Ascribing a group identity negates the differences among the individual children. While the local and national narratives define children born in the bush according to the identity of their fathers as perpetrators and where they were conceived, the children’s own sense of collective identity as a child born into the LRA is based on their shared experiences of relational and structural violence. Recalling the imperative of the social studies of childhood (James et al., 1998), I situate the children as social actors and autonomous individuals within their urban Acholi social environment.

In this chapter, I explore the sometimes similar and sometimes-different ways the children make sense of their collective identity markers and the exclusion they experience in their subjective creation of a sense of self. Through their relationships and dreams for the future,
they make sense of who they were, reflect on who they are, and imagine who they will be in
the future.

7.1 Fathers: From There to Here, Him to Me

7.1.1 ‘He Used to Love Me More than any Other Person’

Many of the children in the study told stories of belonging in the bush. Mostly, they explained
how in the bush, they had loving relationships with their fathers. Idro, for example, wrote about
her father in her journal: “I last saw him when I was young but I could only remember that he
used to love me more than any other person…” A daughter of a top commander, Prudences,
proudly reminded me that she was named after her father's mother. Whenever he called to her,
she told me, he would affectionately call her “Min [father’s name],” meaning ‘[father’s name]'s
mother’. She also described how he used to sit her on his lap and hold up her hand next to his
and tell her they had the same fingers.

Authar is a quiet boy who rarely engaged in our discussions, often looking away with a
pained and uncomfortable look on his face. But with each activity, it was clear he had been
listening and thinking about the issues raised. The past was not spoken about or even acknowl-
edged at home. His mother worked hard to ‘forget’. At first, believing her two children who
were born in the bush had no memories of that time, she told them that her father was their
father. Then later when it became clear her children did not accept that story, she told them not
to ask about their father because she is now both their father and mother. Her daughter told me
that their mother has never talked about the past with them. So when I asked the boys to draw
a time in their lives when they feel like they were or would be part of a family – past, present
or in the future – it surprised me that Authar drew a time from the bush (see Figure 37). He drew a time in Sudan when their lives were relatively peaceful and he could be near his father (pictured, second from the left) and play with his half-siblings. “I think [about my father],” he told me a couple years after he did this drawing. “For me, I think especially when I see his picture. I had his picture but then it got burned in the house. But I used to think much whenever I saw that picture. Now I don't think so much because the picture is not there.”

Figure 37 "Draw a time in your life when you felt like part of a family - past, present, or future,” by Authar.

101 Authar said he found a photo of his father that his mother had kept inside a book. It was from the peace talks in 2006.
Author and his half-brother Ian Anzo remembered how their father (a top commander) would come and eat his dinner with them rather than with the other men. Ian Anzo shared in 2014:

What I remember very well, when I was there (in Sudan), I used to like very much to stay near my father. He had some radio he used to listen to so I would sit with him. And I liked very much to eat with him because definitely his food was always very nice food like meat... And also I liked the stories he would tell... That you know, children are very stubborn. Children like people who really side with them. When my father was telling me stories he used to say, 'Between your mother and father, who do you love?' Then you tell him. One day my mother beat me, I did something wrong even. So when she beat me my father came and found me crying – I cried until my father came. When my father came I told him my mother beat me so he also beat my mother, he caned my mother. And that thing made me very happy. So that is why all the time I stayed with my father.

He also remembered feeling special and part of a large family:

I usually played with my (half) brothers and (half) sisters because our home was in the middle and the other homes were around the outside. When we were living in Sudan, Arabs would come and teach us. After some time that also stopped. But our father would teach us with just a little bit of English.

7.1.2 'My Father is Beautiful'

In order to give their memories of their father more legitimacy, the children simultaneously challenge the popular imagery of their fathers as demonic perpetrators. As the above section suggests, their fathers are very present in their lives, whether they are living or not, returned or still in the bush. They have pride in their fathers' abilities and virtues as soldiers. For those whose fathers are top commanders, they challenge the very 'facts' about him and look up to him as a role model. The children believe their missing fathers loved them and that they would
be good providers if they were around. By claiming their fathers as good (ber) men, they situate themselves as legitimate and loved daughters and sons.

The fathers of three children (all boys) returned from the bush. All three joined the UPDF upon returning and each of these boys greatly admired their fathers as soldiers. The fathers either lived in the barracks or were deployed. Their mothers experienced this very differently from the children. One mother, for example, told me in 2011 how her husband “keeps” seven other women. He would appear without notice a few times a year and stay for a week or two and then disappear again. She was agitated telling this story and insistent that he decide whether he wants to only be with her or not so she can have closure and focus her energy on her children. The children, however, admire their fathers. Emmy explained that his father was in Sudan and he had not seen him in a very long time. He said, however, that he does not worry about his father because he knows he is a good soldier. In his journal, The Rock wrote, “My father is beautiful.”

The children whose fathers were soldiers, either in the UPDF or LRA, look up to their fathers as role models for how to live out their lives. In 2014, three boys wanted to be soldiers or police officers: “I want to take over my father's job, I want to take after him.” Importantly, while these boys’ desire to pursue their fathers’ professions, they are not drawn to the military.

Figure 38 Journal entry.
for any reason other than wanting to be like him. The children have only ever known their fathers to be soldiers, either in the LRA and/or UPDF. In 2014, when I asked him what he wants to be as an adult, Ian Anzo said, “I have two thoughts - being a soldier and being a doctor. I want to be a soldier working with the army but be a doctor for the army.” He did not want to be a foot soldier but rather, he said, he wanted to be a high-ranking soldier like his father, one who never carries a gun. Because his father is a high-ranking commander, Ian Anzo is familiar with an alternative to being a fighting soldier and he thus shaped a career goal with that as his model.

Some children look beyond their fathers’ occupation and suggest they want to emulate him in other ways. Authar said he wants to be a driver “because my father also told me driving is good.” Perhaps because soldiering is not really an option for girls, Clarissa, whose father is a top LRA commander, looked inwards to explain how she is already like her father. Her statement reflects the personal nature of identity formation by insisting she is similar internally to her father, that they share a similar inner world:

Up to now people don't know the reasons he's doing those things, why he's hiding away from home and he has never told that secret to anyone. And me, I have that thing. It's very difficult for you to know what's in my heart. You may find me crying and I'll tell you a different statement from the reason I am really crying. It's really difficult for you to know. And the second thing is I don't entertain nonsense.

The children experience their fathers’ absence in their everyday lives, particularly in material ways (they believe that if their father were with them, he would be able to provide for them). However, some struggle with how to make sense of who they believe their father to be and what is said about him publicly and by peers. While many of the fathers were abducted as boys, they also symbolize the violence perpetrated by the LRA. Children whose fathers are top
commanders, in particular, must address how to position themselves in relation to their fathers who are publicly regarded to be war criminals.

When Clarissa hears or sees news about her father, she feels bad because she does not believe the portrayal of her father. “For me,” said Clarissa, “I don't feel good because some of those informations are wrong. They are not right.” She went on to explain that she had never seen her father do anything like what is reported in the media, which makes her unable to believe what she hears: “Like sometimes they can talk things which me myself have never seen him doing it. They say he did it. So me, I don't feel nice.” Her sister added, “It's not good because it's not him who gets the guns to be shooting people, it's the soldiers.” By challenging his depictions, Clarissa and her sister are also saying something about themselves. That is, they are at once insisting they are legitimate daughters to a good (ber) man and also that are consequently good (ber) girls because they see him reflected in themselves.

Notably, in 2014 Ian Anzo told me that he thinks about his parents sometimes to know himself better:

I don't usually try to avoid thinking about it. I allow the thought to flow the way it is going. Because if I interrupt it, it will keep on coming back. So, what I do is I allow myself to think, finish it all then I begin to read my books. Or I allow myself to think, finish all and then I sit and relax... If I don't think about it, I will not know exactly who and what I am... When I'm thinking, for example, I start thinking 'who is my father?’ My father is such and such. What does he do? He's a soldier. Is he still working as a soldier? What bad things has he done? What good things has he done? What if they capture him, what will they do to him? Who is my mother? What does she do? Does she blame my father?... I try to answer those questions by myself. I may go ahead and say now me, if I grow up will I get a job? Will I live on my father's land? Because even my father's land, we did not reach the very land itself.

Here, Ian Anzo directly connects who he is to his past, his father, and his mother. Who they are, shapes who he feels he is. He also queries his future and not just who he will be in the
future, but also how the past will influence his future. Knowing that Ian Anzo worries how his past and his identity as his father’s son will affect his future, this concern is noticeable in the above statement - he wonders if he will be able to get a job or have access to his land inheritance. As the son of a top commander who is still in the bush, he feels he must take extra care to protect this part of his identity.

In 2014, I asked Ian Anzo if he had felt special in the bush due to the high status of his father. He replied laughing, “Yes... I don't [feel that now], it is not important [now].” In the bush Ian Anzo’s identity as the son of a top commander was a source of prestige for him. Out of the bush, however, his experiences lead him to feel his identity is a potentially life-threatening liability. He explained that he no longer has that same sense of self - of feeling proud of whose son he was. Perhaps because his post-bush experiences have been so antithetical to his life in Sudan, he now laughs at the thought that his identity could be a source of prestige. Notably, however, Ian Anzo adds that this identity is no longer important, almost as though he is trying to convince himself. This last part of his statement implies acceptance of the prevalent narrative about the LRA among his peers, recognizing that identifying with the LRA, and his father specifically, invites hostility.

Highlighting just how significant his past has been to his identity, in 2014 Ian Anzo insisted that someday when it is safe to do so, he will reveal himself publicly. He expressed pride about where he comes from, seeing himself as different but important because of it: “If I manage to go out, I finish my studies and then get to be a mature man now – married, with a family and everything – so I can say it in the news openly that I am the son of [commander].” He had spent time considering when and under what circumstance he would reveal this secret, implying further just how important it was to him that people know who he is:
I will have to really, really study the environment. If I'm stable already, I'm married and I've studied, everything, I will have to weigh the situation. One, look at who's in leadership. If it is still people from the other side, the Buganda and the so-on, it may not be easy for me. They may follow me up and bring me down. That is one. Then secondly, I may look at it – has my father been captured? Is he already... has he gone to court? Those are the things I will consider. Is he very weak now? Is he... so I will look at so many things, then I will make a decision to come out. If the answers are favourable, then I will come out.

Ian Anzo’s identity changed over time during which his father remained a significant part of how he saw himself. This transformation involved a change in how and what he remembered about his father. As a child in the LRA, Ian Anzo’s mother had never told him that he had family outside the bush. When he was captured by a UPDF soldier102 without his mother and taken to live with his maternal family, he had been thrown into an entirely new existence. His sense of prestige and belonging vanished and was replaced with neglect, isolation, and stigmatization. His mother returned many years later. She explained to me that when she returned, she found he was still very proud of his father. He even told people at his school so they would know how important he was. This led to many social problems for him.

When I met him in 2011, he was still somewhat of this mindset. In 2013, he insisted his father was not guilty of committing atrocities because he had never even seen his father carry a gun: “[M]y dad doesn't have guns, he doesn't shoot people.”

[W]hat I hear people say what he has done is too much. Some people even say things which he did not do. And some of the things, anyway, his soldiers did but he did not do. All that I think they will count on him... My father, I did not even see him holding any gun. But his soldiers, I think everything people say they did, they did... The way he told me, he would give orders yes, that you go and beg for something from the

102 The UPDF soldier who captured him was a former LRA and former bodyguard of his father. The soldier had called Ian Anzo out of his hiding place during a battle. Ian Anzo did not realize the man was now a UPDF soldier so he went with him.
civilians. So the soldiers would come to like the Acholis which are up there at the border then they come talking to them... So when people hesitate, that is when soldiers now change their minds, then they start.

By 2014, when he told me that his father’s identity was no longer important, I noticed that his sense of self had begun to shift and he demonstrated significantly more concern about concealing his identity. When I met with him in 2016, his narrative about his father had dramatically altered and he said he no longer felt proud of his father and that he does not have good memories of his father. It seems unlikely that he had actually erased his memories, but rather his narrative about them and the meanings he gave them had changed.

In many ways, Ian Anzo’s changing sense of self reflects a normal passage through developmental stages. Looking at it through a developmental lens, however, overlooks the meanings within a young person’s inner worlds. What Ian Anzo ‘remembers’ and now most importantly how he remembers, reveals the working out of a personal narrative that began before he was captured by the UPDF.103 The trajectory of Ian Anzo’s process of creating a sense of self by telling a coherent story about where he comes from and who he is, reveals a shift from identifying with his dad, to identifying more with his peers and the accepted narrative in the community about his father’s culpability. His subjective sense of who he is must address the very public aspect of his identity that his father embodies. Ian Anzo’s process initially had him close to his father and distant from the general public. “D]uring those days I used to think my

103 A study in South Africa (Langa, 2010) found that adolescent boys with absent fathers expressed sadness and pain for not knowing their fathers, which resonates with the narratives of boys and girls in this dissertation - they long for their fathers and feel different because he is not there. The boys in the South African study, however, expressed shame and embarrassment for not knowing their fathers, sentiments not generally shared by the children in this study. A review of literature about absent fathers (East et al., 2006) recommends the category should not be generalized. Indeed, children born into the LRA struggle to make sense of their fathers’ unique identities as perpetrators of violence that has touched virtually everyone in northern Uganda in some way.
dad was good. I used to think only about him [that] the people are jealous about him, ” he explained. He later seemed to grapple with the stories he heard about his father by carefully constructing his innocence: “My father, I did not even see him holding any gun. But his soldiers, I think everything people say they did, they did.” With this story about his father, he could still feel close to him. When that story began to erode for him, however, it seems Ian Anzo accepted the story that his father is responsible for bad things during the war. “Yeah, the good part he gave for me life. That is good,” he explained. Beyond that, he told me there was no longer any reason to admire him or appreciate him.

His brother, however, remembers their father as a good man. He equates his love for his father to that of any other child. He states he has faith that his father has a valuable and legitimate explanation for his involvement in the war. Beyond that, he invokes the suggestion of divine will to explain it, thus implying his very own conception as a child born into the LRA:

He was joyful, understanding, he was peaceful, smiling, laughing with people and all that. He's really caring… He's my father, I love him like any other person loves his father. And about whatever happened, that one really I really don't understand it so well unless he explains it to me. Like the war. I think he has a big explanation for it but I don't know. But all I know is he's a good man, but you know, there are some things that happen beyond understanding. I just can't understand what happened… Right now, sincerely speaking, I just don't blame anybody. It just happened. Maybe there was this, maybe there was God's plan, it was meant to happen.

Suggesting he is the product of God’s plan, this boy calls upon the equality of all children as God’s children, similar to the sentiment that makes places of worship so appealing for the children in this study. By telling his story framed by such a grand narrative, the boy not only gives his and his father’s lives meaning and moral legitimacy, but he also gives himself a way of making sense of his life and world. His story about why he is alive thus becomes part of a coherent narrative, a grand narrative, with which he can understand himself (Eastmond 2007).
7.2 Mothers

“I like staying with her since she is the one light that is making me to see ahead.” (Idro)

The children in this study all express care and respect for their mothers. It is with their mothers that the children feel most comfortable. Mothers are a significant influence in the children’s development of their sense of who they are. Reflecting this centrality in her life, Cora drew her

Figure 39 “Draw the most important people in you your life,” by Cora.
mother (see Figure 39) when I asked the children to draw the most important people in their lives: “I drew a picture of my mom and our house. That one (hearts) is love. I love my mother.”

The children are committed to both helping their mothers and remaining very close to her into their adulthood, reflecting an emotional imperative because she provides them with security and comfort. This is particularly notable among the girls since culturally, girls are expected to marry into another clan and leave their homes, which would mean leaving their mothers. This drive to remain with their mothers seems to have two sources. On the one hand, the children want to help their mothers live better futures because they have seen her work hard yet suffer tremendously for their wellbeing, but it is more nuanced than simply that. Many of the children suggest a deep sense of belonging with their mothers and therefore cannot imagine a future without them. As one girl exclaimed, “When I am with my mother I feel so happy.”

The children feel that the suffering their mothers endured for their well-being and survival deserves reciprocation. The mothers brought their children through extreme danger to the relative security of their Gulu homes. Having children so young (most often between the ages of 14-17) and not having learned how to be a parent left many of the young mothers feeling inadequate and unsure in their roles (Baines 2016). Nevertheless, the mothers carry stories of survival and selfless efforts to protect their children, something that is not lost on the children. Emmanuella’s mother, for example, was released by the LRA in 2002 with her son, but refused to leave because she did not have Emmanuella with her. They remained in captivity for two more years before finally escaping with all of her children. There have, however, been unfortunate reports (not in the project) of a very small number of mothers killing their children in anger, blaming the children for their suffering. Julius reported that when his mother is angry,
she tells him about the “bad women” who abandoned their children in the bush and says he should treat her well because “if she was a bad woman, she would have thrown me in the bush.” On a lighter note but with a similar reference, Idro said laughing, “My mother, when she is talking, she often says she needed to leave me there in the bush because I'm very stubborn.”

It seems that within this project, the mothers care deeply about their children and the children sense this. From his years of working with GUSCO and later other organizations that assist children born into the LRA, James (social worker) reflected,

What I am happy with is the mothers, they love their children. One would think that you hate the child that has been born out of this kind of thing. Been raped several times and been forced to give birth to the child out of that. But they really have love for those children. That is what I've seen.

The special bond they share with their mothers is because of the difficult past they share, explained Idro:

There is a special relationship because of the past. For example, if maybe something has gone wrong, then they need to punish the children... the mother will just say 'Ah, for me you don't punish my child. You don't know how much I suffered with this child.' So they protect you.

When asked how he feels about his mother, Cresent said, “I feel my mother is important because she suffered for me.” Keila said she feels close to her mother when she tells her stories about their past in the bush, but it also saddens her: “I like it when my mom talks about the past, but I feel pain in my heart to hear that she suffered so much.” Hope explained that their relationship is unique: “It's different. It's because we experienced difficult things together.” Their recognition of their mothers' courageous perseverance is linked to an emotional concern and connection with them.
Similar to how the children insist on their legitimacy as normative daughters and sons by challenging the imagery of their fathers, the children look at their mothers as strong and devoted Acholi mothers. They often attribute their good values and characteristics to their mothers, implying that not only are they normative, but that their mothers are good mothers also: “For me how I see, I have only my mother. She's both my mother and my father. She's the one who kept me up to this age and she made me what I am up to today.” Timothy said he learned to be a good person from his mother, by “listening to what my mother tells me I should be doing.” “My mother,” explained Joshua, “She keeps on watching us. If we try to do something bad she gets tough on us so she hardens up.”

The children describe how they learn humility from their mothers when she draws on their difficult past. Cresent said his mother tells him not to have the same expectations as other children, “Because for me she tells me that I was born from the bush. I don’t have to be like the children of some rich people here.” Laura and her brother had been living in an orphanage for many years but her mother said she tells them during their holiday visits that “they are children with many problems and they are being helped from there (orphanage). When they come home they must struggle and work hard because there is no one else to support me.”

Writing in her journal, Idro carefully frames her parents’ marriage insisting on its legitimacy. She does this by explaining how her mother waited for him and only married another man after her father died.

My mum gave birth to a baby girl who died when she was less than one year. Am the second born. After when I was seven years old, she returned back home and my father was left in the bush. Two years later my mum heard a story that my dad was killed when he was going to Juba, his father’s place. She decided to remarry to another man who don’t loves us and yet has nothing to do. Is only my mum to struggle and take care of us.
It seemed significant to me as I read the journal that she made these corrections to her story (see Figure 40). Not only did she carefully rephrase her statement, but with another pen, suggesting she returned to it at a later time, after consideration. The correction legitimizes both her mother’s marriage to her father and her mother as a culturally appropriate woman.

Mothers may insist on their own social and cultural belonging through narratives that include their children who were born in the bush as key elements. This involvement in their mothers’ legitimacy seems to contribute to their feelings of closeness to their mothers while also creating a sense of duty to affirm their stories. Baines and Stewart (2011) suggest that Ajok, a young woman who became a mother in the bush, negotiated her belonging by “claiming that she legitimately occupied the critical positions fulfilling the traditional Acholi woman’s life cycle” (p. 15). Similar to how Ajok positioned motherhood in her narrative, Joshua’s mother, who was 15 when he was born, describes her transformation from seeing Joshua as something that “spoiled my future” to considering him as the embodiment of the very basis of her claim to belonging as a good mother who struggled to support her child:

Figure 40 Idro’s journal entry.
I ran back there also. I came back and found that he was seriously crying. So I carried him. On his leg here, someone stepped on him with a gum boot, there was a wound already. When I carried him he was still crying. I dropped my luggage to carry him, then I started going with him. So he cried and we just continued. I cried. At that very moment, I also cried. I told myself that this is my child. This is the child who spoiled my future... so I cried and walked together with these people. Now that I've returned home and I sit and look at Joshua, I see he's the very person who spoiled my future... But again, though he's the one who spoiled my future, I still look at him as the blessing at the same time for me because God knows how He does his things. You see, when I returned here, it was not easy. I was not received well. So maybe God knew that if I returned at that very time with no child, it would be worse for me. So I look at him as the key to my bright future. So always when I look at Joshua, I see he's something good for me. He's the only one who is going to open the doors for me. So these other children of mine do not know that I honour him, that I like him so much, that I treasure him so much...I believe he knows I struggled with him so much when I was in the bush. I had to protect him. I had to do everything. If I raise him and he becomes a man, I am sure he is going to struggle to develop his life and to put his life in a very good state, which will always give me pride as a mother who struggled with her child.

She expresses a kind of hopeful reciprocity and hinges her identity on Joshua’s success - as a mother who struggled with her child for him to succeed. Idro's mother echoed similar expectations:

I feel Idro's future should be good and a bright one. But sometimes I get so heartbroken when I see the things (hauntings) which are happening to her. To me, I feel she's the one who is going to open for me, who is going to change my future. So I just pray and wish that her future is good and that these things should stop happening to her.

Perhaps sensing the precariousness of their legitimacy and the fact that their mothers’ is based on their ability to put their “life in a very good state,” their mothers’ situation motivates the children to work and study hard. Emmanuella explained, “Yes, it motivates me to study hard... Because your parent did not study so you have to study hard.” Idro similarly stated, “I feel that since my mom did not study and now she struggles so much to look for a good job and it's very difficult for her to get one. So I feel I should study hard and help her in the future.”
In this statement, Idro reflects the children’s common consideration about their role in their mothers’ lives and their sense of moral obligation to be responsible for their mother in the future. With this exchange in responsibility, Idro’s statement suggests that she will always be committed to her mother and thus always influenced by her mother’s suffering.

The children’s sense of moral obligation to support their mothers may also be derived from a sense of culpability, not just a sense of indebtedness. For example, in a journal entry, Idro pleads to God to step in to ease her mother’s suffering:

> Before she was working in [a business] as a seamstress, but now she can stay at home and sew from home, and if people do not bring their clothes that means we are not supposed to eat and our lives depend on the customers. Sometimes we stay for two days without eating... And my mother was abducted when she was in P2 and she grew from there and gave birth to two of us and after returning back she is still suffering with us, so why God not to help her?

Children born of wartime sexual violence in other contexts reportedly express a sense of guilt. In their study of girls who were born of wartime rape in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Erjavec and Volcic (2010a; 2010b) found that the girls feel guilty in their relationships with their mothers because they believe they are living reminders of their mothers’ trauma. Idro places herself into the storyline of her mother’s suffering, suggesting she is a cause for her mother’s past and ongoing suffering, mostly through poverty and the burden of raising her children alone. In her plea, Idro thus expresses culpability in a material form. Feminist scholarship (Ross, 2003; Theidon, 2007) about the failure of truth and reconciliation processes argues that the suffering for many women is often not about incidents of acute violence in isolation - not the physical experience of pain. Rather, it is about the breakdown of the everyday (Ross, 2003), the everyday harms surrounding or resulting from the violence. Similarly, Idro suggests that her mother’s suffering is not so much about memories of pain, but rather the ongoing structural
violence she endures as a result of the violence. The scholarship also argues that often harms are implicit in stories about violence through words, gestures, and silences (Ross, 2003; Aiolan & Turner, 2007). In Idro’s statement, she draws a line from her mother’s abduction at a young age to her current suffering and she places herself as part of this lineage of violence her mother experienced. Also implicit in her plea is a sense of feeling left out of God’s will, unlike the mothers who place their children within God’s plan. In other journal entries, however, she oscillates between trusting in Him and, like her plea above, asking Him why she has been forsaken. Through her words, Idro invokes feelings of hurt and injustice. She wavers between feeling part of a larger narrative in her trust in God and feeling completely alienated - even from God. She looks to God to help resolve her wavering and seemingly irreconcilable sense of culpability and responsibility for her mother's struggles.

The children care very much about their mothers. They experience this in their everyday lives most significantly as the one person with whom they belong. Having been through hardships in the bush together, the children consider themselves to have a special bond with their mothers (see Figure 41). They all speak of their deep desire to help their mothers in the future as a moral obligation. In doing so, the children locate themselves in their mothers’ stories. They are thus at once their mothers’ future, and also the cause of their mothers’ suffering - they tell stories that both legitimize themselves as Acholi sons and daughters and also ones that situate themselves as a liability to her suffering. The children’s multiple and conflicting locations in their mothers’ stories reflect the discordant narratives they encounter in their social lives - they are marginalized and unwanted by their society, while they are also told they are precious and just as valuable as other children.
Journal entry by Genesis who, like the other children often spoke fondly of his mother and her hard work to provide for him. This is a drawing of her sewing. Upon return, most of the mothers in this study were taught to sew through NGO programs. For many of the households in this study, their mother’s tailoring work is the only source of income.

7.3 Family

Families in Acholi society are the foundation of identity and belonging. The war led to “cultural degeneration” (Ochen, p. 246) in which kinship was seriously destabilized from the mass
displacement (Dolan, 2009). As Rosenoff-Gauvin (2013) writes, “Although families originally settled by village (sub-clan), as space became scarce, everyone mixed. Social control by family, lineage, and sub-clan eroded in this environment. Children grew up without knowing who their extended relatives were” (p. 41). Rebuilding familial structures after the war was hard work (Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2013) – this included returning land to crop growing state, constructing huts and latrines, and also educating children how to live a rural subsistence life. The burden of welcoming children who had been abducted and lived among the rebels and even children born in captivity was a responsibility not easy for some families to absorb. Where villages (based on kinship) were once extremely inclusive of children regardless of their parentage, explains Ochen (2014), post-conflict Acholi society was different making integration very difficult. Before the war, orphaned children were said to have been integrated into communities with little problem:

In Acholiland we have always said that orphans would be fed via the wang oo. This was based on the fact that in any Acholi homestead food would be served outside at the wang oo and all people would eat together. Selfishness was discouraged and all women were compelled to cook and bring food for everyone within that homestead. These practices significantly got eroded during the war but they have been strong cultural safety nets for [the] upbringing of children without mothers or fathers. The Acholi cultural values did not promote any form of discrimination against orphans, and other children were not required to remind the orphaned children of their situation. (Council of Elders, Ker Kwaro Acholi as cited in Ochen 2014, p. 244)

When mothers returned home, it was often her male relatives who manipulated their patriarchal power to turn her away. This rejection has left these mothers and their children extremely vulnerable to the many difficulties brought by poverty, which was the case with several children in the project.

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104 See Branch (2011) for a further analysis about patriarchal power in postwar Acholiland.
Despite the challenges, however, many families have done so successfully. The children in this study who have been accepted into their mothers' families share meaningful experiences of belonging – of feeling wanted and of participating in cultural activities. Most of the children who are connected to their maternal families related that they enjoyed visiting their mothers' villages. Some of them drew happy pictures of themselves at their maternal grandmother's home. Emmanuella’s drew the below image when I asked the children to draw a time in their lives that they felt like they were part of a family. In her drawing, she depicts many children playing and sitting around a fire. Like Emmanuella’s drawing (see Figure 42), the children said they like going to their maternal village because they enjoyed playing with the other children there and listening to both their grandmothers' stories and the stories told around a fire in the traditional storytelling referred to as *wang oo*.

Having a maternal home allows the children to perform normative cultural practices. By participating in the reciprocity of social life in the village, the children negotiate their “in-placeness” (Cresswell, 1996) as Acholi children. Rosenoff-Gauvin (2013) and others (Baines & Stewart, 2011; Oloya, 2013; p’Bitek, 1986) point to the significance of oral tradition practices as fundamental to the creation and maintenance of social relations. Stories, even those imparted during everyday activities such as gardening or food preparation, contain moral and social lessons about how to relate to others, how to be in the world.
Referring to the joy of participating in cultural activities, Joshua wrote in his journal that during holidays “we are not supposed to remain in towns, we should... go to the village.” He explained that it was expected for them to go to the village (his maternal village since he does not know his paternal home) and contribute to the work there: “After school we are going to help our grandmother to harvest the crops that are ready like beans, millet, maize, cassava, sorghum, preparing land, selecting seeds, weeding, pruning, thinning etc.” These everyday practices represent their participation in the family clan and also in the culture. By engaging in these activities with their maternal families, the children participate in the reciprocity of social life that is fundamental to Acholi personhood.
7.3.1 Siblings

Siblings often provide a source of support, friendship, and heartbreak for the children born into LRA captivity, not unlike other children. While many of the children's relationships with their siblings seem no different than others, there are some aspects that are unique to their pasts that are worth identifying because they highlight the presence of a particularly close bond with family who have been through the struggle of the bush and the subsequent stigma and hardships – a shared understanding. As David lamented about his deceased brother, “If he was still there, at least we would be two of us so each one of us would advise the other because we would know very well where we came from, we would know our past.” This (often silently) shared understanding between siblings who were born in the bush creates a space of belonging where they do not need to talk about the past or their troubles with their identities but in which they feel support and alliance. For some, the social space of siblings enables the children to remain connected to their pasts and identities and to stay close to their shared fathers. For those who have siblings missing, still in the bush, and/or who died before transitioning or after, they are not forgotten but instead remain part of who they are.

Several families in the project consist of two siblings from the bush – sometimes the same mother but different fathers. In these cases, each sibling struggles with the void of their missing father and often not knowing their paternal family. Sometimes, one father is present. This shared experience is one they rarely talk about with each other, but in confidence they reveal that it matters. Modesta worries about her half-sister who must live with her violent biological father who is now a teacher. This man was their mother's second out of three bush husbands. He had escaped and returned before their mother, who was then given to another
man in the bush. When she finally returned with her three children (all different fathers), the second bush husband (the father of Modesta’s sister) sought her out. He first came to see them in GUSCO. Later when they were hungry they sometimes went to Child Protection Unit (CPU) in Gulu where they could be given food and the man was there. He insisted she bring the children to town and stay with him so they could study at his school, presumably for free or reduced fee because he was working as a teacher. She resisted, because “he had shown me what he was like.” Upon her return in 2004, her family received her well, but they were very poor. And then in 2006 her mother died. “That broke my heart,” she explained. When people stopped visiting after the funeral, she felt hopeless and decided that if she went to that man, at least the children could go to school. That was in 2007. In 2013 she escaped with her children out of fear he was going to kill the two who were not his. But by 2014, the second born was living with him to go to school. Modesta (the oldest sibling) expressed concern for her sister's well-being saying, “She's not fine from there because she says that when she's there she has to do a lot of work. She has to go and weed potatoes, and she comes back without eating. She has to start cooking food again. She normally eats at around 8pm in the evening. And the father is so rude on her.” She empathized, “I don't feel good,” remembering what it was like to live with that man.

A testament of the deep emotional sibling relationships these children experience is the story of Clarissa and one of her siblings. Her mother had just given birth at a particularly violent time as they were walking through the bush and no one in their group had eaten or drunk in a week. She was exhausted and unable to carry her new child, forcing her to lay the newborn down and continue on without her. But Clarissa refused to leave her sibling and carried the baby and helped her mother until she had recovered strength.
Another example is Emmanuella and Julius who have different fathers, both of whom died in the bush, who seem to share a special bond in their troubles and loss. Together they endured a violent stepfather who segregated them because they were not his children. Although this man was their mother's (third) bush husband, the now-UPDF soldier had little tolerance for the two fathered by other LRA soldiers. In the bush, men were expected to treat their step-children (his wife's children from a deceased LRA fighter) equally as his own. While this expectation was strictly enforced, accounts by mothers depict much different lived realities. Once they transitioned out of the bush, it seemed that stepfathers became more openly hostile to their non-biological children. After the mother left their step father, Julius decided he and his sister needed a home of their own to avoid any similar trouble in the future. So in 2014, he made large piles of bricks with which he is hoping to use to construct a small home for just he and Emmanuella, with whom he feels has shared a similar plight of ostracization as himself, especially at the hands of their stepfather.

The relationships between half-siblings who share a father but not mother are inconsistent across families, although there are some unique and notable examples of relationships that were fostered during their time in the bush and remain strong. In large part, the mothers have fostered these relationships, but part of their enduring closeness is related to their familial experience in the bush. In the bush, mothers were expected to keep all children, including those of their co-wives, as their own. Due to the extreme conditions under which they lived in the bush and the scarcity of resources, however, women often favoured their own children over others out of necessity. When there was not enough to go around, co-wives vied for favours and tried their best to give their children the best chances for survival.
Life among co-wives was often very difficult (Baines, 2016). But there are nevertheless cases out of the bush where these co-wives support each other in different ways and nurture the relationships between their children. One group of half-siblings in the project whose father is a top LRA commander, for example, go between their mother's home and their half-siblings' homes. Some semi-permanent living arrangements have even been negotiated between the mothers. Some of the children call their stepmothers “mama” and there appears to be a real affection by the mothers to their children's half-siblings, perhaps reflecting their sense of relatedness from the family-like arrangements in the bush. Also, hierarchies among co-wives weakened once they returned as a result of the common experience of stigma and poverty and some mothers and co-wives came together because they shared experiences of rejection and stigma and could offer support and advice to each other based on common knowledge about their pasts. It is perhaps in recognition of the relative safety provided by keeping together, as well as a response to their lack of extended families that mothers nurture the relationships among their children.

This cooperation has fostered a valuable support network for the children. The children often seek out their half-siblings at school. There are several children in the project who said their best friends at school were their half-siblings. There is an ease they feel when they are among their half-siblings, and they feel free to be open about their pasts. Sometimes, they share stories about the past with each other. Sometimes, they work together to keep the secret of their identities. Some half-siblings remain in the bush and the children worry about their well-being and long to play with them again. Junior, who lost both his parents longs to reconnect with his half-sibling who he remembers playing with and who is the same age, but her whereabouts are unknown. In his heart, she represents his closest blood relation.
Another example of the significance of sibling relations from the bush is the sincerely missed brothers and sisters who died or went missing before they could transition out of the bush. Eight of the children lost a sibling in the bush, and then also there is David’s brother who died from complications related to the HIV he was born with in the bush (his mother had contracted it from her third bush husband). These lost siblings are remembered carefully, despite very little to remember them by. Keila, for example, loves to sit and listen to her mother tell stories about their time in the bush, and she especially likes it when her mother talks about her brother who was killed in the fire that disfigured her legs. Junior witnessed his brother die as he was strapped onto his mother’s back. A UPDF soldier shot her as she ran away during a battle: “Only my mom and brother were the ones who died together because he was strapped on her back... My mother was running and she knocked herself and fell and they shot her.” He was still young at the time, and has very few clear memories: “Apart from playing with [my brother], there is nothing... I don't remember.”

There are other siblings they will never know, other than through their mothers' stories. Stephany’s older brother was dropped in a river as a baby by the escort who carried him during a battle. Others died in a big fire, died of sickness, or killed or simply lost in battle. Despite having no documentation that they ever lived, the presence of these lost children is significant in the lives of both the siblings and mothers. Keila’s mother described the loss she feels in regard to her first born who died in the bush, reflecting a sense of injustice and dispossession and a longing for something tangible to mark their lives:

I don't have any photo. There's no documentation because even the card that was used for his immunization and everything, it all remained there (in Sudan). But also photos

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105 At least one full-sibling remains missing. Accounts suggest she was taken during a battle and her sister and half-siblings remain hopeful she will one day be found. Several other full-siblings remain in captivity.
from the bush it was very difficult for us because there was not business there that we could go to take photos. Yes, Arabs took a lot of photos but they never gave them back to us… [W]e think about it but there is nothing we can do. But if maybe… at some point the children are registered, we would really appreciate that. Because that would serve as a reminder… and [we can] say this is what happened.

7.4 Future Aspirations

“Because I am in school at least, maybe if God allows then I may be someone in the future.” Idro

“I don't want to be a poor person.” Ian Anzo

The children see their futures as their escape from marginality. They see themselves with good jobs, cars, their own families, and taking care of their mothers and siblings. They have big dreams – they want to be doctors, lawyers, judges, nurses, teachers, mechanics, and drivers. Their mothers hope the children will be the ones to lift them out of poverty, to not perpetuate a cycle of the poverty in which they are so entrenched. The children's own desires drive them most of all. They long for lives in which they are not held down by their pasts.

More common was the desire to not have their own children suffer like they did: “I want to be a woman... whose children will not suffer the way I suffered.” Clarissa wrote in her journal, “If I grow up, study very hard and become a lawyer, I will make sure that my children live a good life. In other words they will not suffer the way I did. I [will] make sure that they eat good food, sleep in a good house and learn in a very good school around.” For some this meant getting out of Uganda altogether:

I want to study. You know, studying is also hard. So, if someone supports me and I study and I reach a certain level and I get some job to do, I want to get out of the country
too. Maybe to countries like Kenya, or maybe to America. Then I stay there. I may come back, or never even... life here is difficult.

As previously mentioned, those with the additional stigma of their father being a top commander believe that getting out of Uganda is the only way they feel certain they will not be discriminated against based on their identity: “And also here even in Uganda getting a job... Like me, if maybe some people gets to know that I am a son to [commander],” explained Ian Anzo, “I may not even get a job here easily. Because someone may say, 'I am not giving a job to this boy because he's the son to this man and this man killed my father.'”

The children through relationships imagine the future. By 2014, a noticeable difference emerged between the boys and the girls and their hopes for the future. p'Bitek (1986) wrote that in Acholi only those men who were married were counted as men, while women are expected to get married and leave her clan and join her husband's. “The result of this most powerful social force,” he wrote, “was that there was a great urge to marry...” There was no doubt that the boys were focusing more on having families and providing for them than the girls, but neither group seemed in a hurry. They all prioritized their educations and career pursuits above all else with the end goal of marriage and providing for their families. It was the girls, however, who remained most concerned about supporting their mothers in the future. As Emmanuella shared in 2014, “Nowadays the way I look at myself, I am studying well and in the future I will be someone who helps my parent.”
7.5 Discussion

In a 2015 activity, participants illustrated the contrast between how they see their futures as children born in captivity and what they imagine their lives would be like if they had been born 'here'. Shanny Flavia explained her drawing, pointing to her colourless depiction of herself as someone who was born in captivity, “This woman here is poor, she is going to look for a job, she is not educated, she has a hut made from grass and she walks without shoes.” Then Shanny Flavia pointed to a much more vibrant and colourful illustration of a woman who lives in a house with iron sheet roofs, whom she described as having been born ‘here’: “This woman here is educated, she is going for work and she is a nurse and she lives in a good house, a iron sheet roofed house. And she has good things like clothes, shoes, and a nice bag.”

In her first image, the woman is walking down a bumpy road in bare feet whereas the woman on the right looks as though she is moving easily on a smooth road, in stylish red shoes. The two drawings represent the contrast between the children’s lived experiences and their lived expectations. In this activity, however, most of the children depicted themselves living in more extreme poverty than their actual current living conditions. Shanny Flavia, for example, always has shoes, both when I have visited her at home and for research activities. The story Shanny Flavia tells with her drawing of herself as a person born in captivity next to herself as a person born ‘here’, is one that implies a sense of potential and exemplifies injustice. Drawing an extreme example of her life as a child born ‘there’ against an idyllic image of herself as a successful, independent woman had she been born ‘here’, she represents a conflicted sense of self - one with the potential to be more than their excluded selves are permitted.
Idro’s conflicted sense of self manifested as she grew. She used to insist she wanted to be a doctor. She found a sponsor and was attending a good boarding school, she became head girl through an election at her boarding school, was a top dancer in an Acholi youth cultural dance group, and was well liked by her peers. Her spiritual problems, however, became too much for the school and she was expelled in 2015 (see Chapter Four). Her sponsor continued paying for her to go to a day school but to escape poverty and her abusive stepfather, when I visited in 2016, she was living as a housewife wife, chronically sick, but in school. If she had

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106 Similar to school president.
not been born in the bush, she laments, “I would have been healthy in mind and body.” But now, she says, “I will soon be useless... my life [is] useless now.” Desperate to live elsewhere, Idro wrote in 2014,

I think if I get married to someone who loves and cares for me to forget some of my problems since I don't want to stay with my mom, not because I hate her but because she has someone whom I don't want (stepfather)…

Idro's mother sought out a husband to be independent from her own abusive family. She married the man that Idro now seeks to escape. “I know men are not good,” she wrote in 2016, “but I have started staying with mine.” In the stories Idro has shared with me in the years I have known her, she connects her “useless” life to her past - to not having a father, to the spirits of the dead people she passed in the bush, to their rejection by her maternal family, to her mother’s loss of education. For some, such as Idro, their pasts continue to be a significant element in shaping how they understand their lives and who they are, even as they move into adulthood.

Their work to create a sense of self is complex and dynamic and the children draw from their relationships to inform who they are. Their storytelling, which is part of their process of self creation, is about locating themselves in their social worlds. Their stories offer insights into their subjective sense of who they are and who they are becoming in relation to others; in particular, relationships central to the upbringing and care of a child, as well as their hopes and aspirations about their future as adults. Children born into the LRA, like other children born of war, transgress the normative divide between private and public realms by forcing the private (sex) to be public (in war). Their creations of self are thus a kind of reclaiming of their private realm and an insistence of their personhood.
Initially conceived under orders to produce citizens to populate a new Acholi nation, the children were born with the purpose of reproducing a group identity, the initial *raison d’être* among children born of war worldwide (Carpenter, 2010). In their communities, children born into the LRA represent the embodiments of the immorality of the war and signifiers of the atrocities rather than as persons who participate in familial and community activities. At the national level, children born into the LRA are rarely officially acknowledged. It is thus important to both identify the children as a unique survivor population, but also to challenge the harmful group identities. Significantly, by recognizing their effort to make a sense of self, we also acknowledge their capacity and desires to be more than their labels as LRA children, rebel children, or even as children born of war. While the children are unique individuals and their sense of who they are is never static, they share key life experiences that significantly contribute in their efforts of creating a sense of who they are. Studying how they make a sense of self reveals the differences and commonalities among them and illuminates their common sources of support and strength, which can inform meaningful policy and programming interventions.

Notably, the final line of Charli Carpenter’s (2010) book about the absence of children born of wartime sexual violence on the global agenda points to the centrality of the aspirations and family relationships in the life of a boy born of war: “And Alen Muhic plays soccer in Gorazde, ignores the children at school who bully him, worries about his aging parents, and dreams of becoming a doctor” (p. 196). Earlier Carpenter argues that only by looking beyond the politicizations of the identities of children born of war can we challenge how they are positioned and perceived and facilitate the creation of a “culture of protection” (p. 194) whereby children born of war are not further harmed by their society and government.
8. Conclusion: ‘[K]eep things to yourself and just life goes on’

This dissertation explored how children born into the LRA make sense of and respond to their everyday lived experiences and what micro and macro processes shape those experiences. Using a child-centered methodology, I sought to understand how the children in this study experience their lives as sons and daughters of perpetrators who are held responsible for much of the population’s suffering. The research centered children’s voices and subjectivities. Using an interpretive framework of the politics of belonging and nation-building and hegemonic masculinity, their perspectives make visible the role of local, national, and historical systems and structures of power in shaping their experiences and marginal positionality.

Five years, the duration of this study, is a long time in the lives of youth. The participants have gone from children to young adults and much has changed both in their communities and in their personal lives. As individuals, they have become more reflective and capable of understanding the significance of their identities in their society. Yet, even as they navigate their social worlds, the knowledge generated through the children’s stories over the five years of research point to the persistence of their sense of exclusion. Reflecting in 2016 on whether he will ever tell anyone about his identity, one boy concluded, “You know, people will look at you like some outcast and a lot of things. So, it's better to just keep things to yourself and just life goes on.” In other words, despite their best efforts to successfully negotiate the boundaries defining their marginalization, they recognize their individual limitations to transform the complex politics informing the denial of their belonging.
This chapter will advance conclusions that underline the significance of the children’s efforts to challenge their exclusion and navigate toward better life positions. Reviewing the central findings of my research questions, I will consider the implications of the findings for conceptualizing children born of war. But first, I reflect on the importance of a child-centered methodology, followed by a review of the findings and their implications for how children born of war are conceptualized. I end the chapter with reflections on directions for future research with children born into the LRA and children born of war, more broadly.

8.1 Long-term child-centered research

Grounded in the everyday lived experiences of children born into the LRA, I locate this research methodologically within the social sciences of childhood, which recognizes the autonomy of children and the meaningful experience of childhood, and advocates for research with children (rather than simply about children) to understand matters that concern them. In other words, children should be positioned in research as the experts about their lives. The research employed a participatory approach and used a mix of methods that included play, drawing, journals, interviews, home visits, and group discussions. Participatory research facilitated shared ownership of the research process (reflected in part by our reference to the research as ‘the project’) and knowledge between myself, Proscovia, and the children.  

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107 The following is an outcome of the long-term group meetings. At a meeting at the end of 2016, the group decided to formalize and register as a community-based organization. They subsequently elected leaders, a treasurer, and a spokesperson and at their September 2017 meeting, they collectively finalized their group’s constitution (see Appendix 2), which is necessary to register with the district. They chose to call themselves Warom Child and Youth in Development. Warom means ‘we are the same.’ Throughout the research project, the children often insisted, “We are all the same.” Their claim was a response to the exclusion they experienced in their everyday lives.
Clark-Kazak (2006) recommends researchers invest time and energy in relationships with young participants of marginalized war-affected populations. Doing so, she writes, can avoid essentializing their experiences and enable better understanding of the nuance and complexity of their subject positions. Taking time to build trust and respectful relationships over a five-year period was a critical aspect of the research process for this study. I believe it encouraged meaningful contributions and connections between participants, which continue today. Such longitudinal research is not always feasible. A significant part of this research, for example, was self-funded\textsuperscript{108}, which is not an option for many, yet long-term studies by graduate students are rarely granted financial support. My familiarity with the children and their individual lives, as well as their relationships with each other and with Proscovia were nurtured with time, which undoubtedly led to more accurate, richer data and a deeper, “thicker” descriptions of their everyday lives (Geertz, 1994), which is most reflected in David’s story and the other empirical chapters (four, five, and seven). Not only did my own ability to contextualize the knowledge grow throughout the research process, but I was able to observe better the dynamics influencing life in Gulu. This depth allowed me to answer the research questions:

1. How do the children experience their everyday social lives?
2. How do they make sense of their experiences?
3. What strategies and resources do they use or access to help navigate their everyday lives?
4. What macro and micro processes lend insight into or explain these experiences?

\textsuperscript{108} The end of term meetings, from 2012 to present, have mostly been funded through the sale of my artwork, as mentioned in Chapter One. From 2012 onwards, travel, employment costs for Proscovia, and research activities have been self-funded.
As a longitudinal study centering the perspectives of children born into the LRA, this study has attempted to destabilize both Euro- and adult-centric assumptions about childhood and war-affected children in particular. In this sense, the study is a response to the call made by anthropologist Jason Hart (2006) to challenge current constructions of war-affected children and Clark-Kazak’s (2011) urge to politicize war-affected young people rather than resorting to dominant apolitical categorizations. Hart argues that a critical debate about children in the South in contexts of armed conflict must be developed to respond to the mainstream literature voicing outrage about the issue of child soldiers and the overrepresentation of child soldiers in academic research (Clark-Kazak, 2011). To avoid apolitical constructions of children affected by war and to complicate simplistic trends of interest (such as the abundant concern about child soldiers), Hart (2006) insists that research about children in settings of armed conflict must involve political and historical context. This research, he says, should be based on “empirical accounts of children’s everyday lives amidst conditions shaped by both local and global forces” (p. 6-7). With this study, I have attempted to contribute to this effort.

8.2 Children born of war and politics of belonging

Using the conceptual framework of politics of belonging and hegemonic masculinity in nation-building, my analysis found that children born into the LRA are both political actors and figures. In Chapter Three, I responded to the research question, What macro and micro processes lend insight into or explain the experiences of the children in this study? To answer, I contextualized the experiences of the children in the historical socio-political roots of the war in
northern Uganda. Donna Seto’s (2013; 2015) theoretical approach to children born of war suggests that they are symbolically used by nations at war or recovering to strengthen sovereign control and governance by defining boundaries of belonging in their post-conflict societies – who is legitimate and who is not. The case of children born into the LRA, I suggest, points to the Ugandan state’s symbolic employment of the sexuality of abducted girls and young women to denigrate the Acholi, which affirmed its national power. Thinking critically about the figure of the abducted girl uncovers how the sexuality of the (mostly) Acholi abducted girls and young women became a tool used by both President Museveni and the LRA’s leader Kony for their own nation-building projects. I have demonstrated how the abducted Acholi girls and young women were discursively only given the social identity of girls, not mothers. President Museveni’s use of the figure of the abducted girl was predicated on the emasculation and infantilization of the Acholi population. This political deployment of the figure of the abducted girl required the government simultaneously and decisively overlook the presence of her children. By tracing Uganda’s emergence as a militarized masculine state and neoliberal darling of the developing world, the omission of children born into the LRA from the national narrative about the war reveals it to be an important element in the macro-level politics of belonging.

Along with the historical and contemporary political exclusion of the Acholi and the devastation wrought by the war in northern Uganda, the strategic use of the figure of the abducted girl by both the Ugandan government and the LRA facilitated the local construction of her children as the embodiments of moral and social disorder. In Chapters Four and Six, I answered the research question that asked how the children experience their everyday lives. Chapter Four, in particular, demonstrated how local-level politics of belonging played out in the places of their everyday lives and how it shaped their experiences. Place proved to be an
integral level of analysis in understanding how the politics of belonging is actualized in the lives of the children born into the LRA.

The children are not, however, solely acted upon. Much of the existing NGO reports and academic scholarship about children born of war ends with discussions of their victimhood. As Chapters Five and Six demonstrate, however, they are also actors in the politics of belonging, negotiating with the forces and structures that shape their everyday lives and experiences of exclusion. Their negotiations represent their efforts to challenge their exclusion. Chapters Five and Six responded to the research question, What strategies and resources do they use or access to help navigate their everyday lives? They found that the children negotiated a partial belonging by forgetting, social passing, praying, and claiming their rights. Chapter Seven answered the question about how they make sense of their experiences. In the stories the children told, they affirmed who they believe themselves to be, where they come from, and who they aspire to be in the future. They make sense of themselves in relation to others.

Each of the final three empirical chapters in this thesis underscore the agency of the children and forefronts their subjectivities in ways that a singular focus on their victimhood obscures. While they are political figures, they are also political actors, which importantly complicates essentialized and powerless depictions of war-affected children, as cautioned by both Hart (2006) and Clark-Kazak (2007; 2011). Clark-Kazak’s (2011) study similarly demonstrates the dynamic, heterogeneous, and political lives of the young people in her research project. A concern for the growing field of children born of war is that the focus remains on their victimhood to the exclusion of their political selves. The social media profile of a boy featured in this dissertation defiantly states: “I am a child born of war but it doesn't matter who I am. Neither am I quiet nor voiceless. No condition is permanent never. Ask more of my
experience and I will tell you.”

This study has explored these aspects of their lives and reflects this boy’s sense that “no condition is permanent” - they insist on challenging their exclusion.

In contextualizing their experiences, however, the inequities and injustices they encounter in their everyday lives are revealed to be products of the past and current global order, contributing to the challenges they face in overcoming the limitations of their identities. Recall Ian-Anzo’s statement from Chapter Five, in which he reflected on his fear of being identified if his father is captured:

That is the thing I fear. And when they now know my identity, I [am] deceiving them. I feel very bad. And some of them they even told me what this LRA has done to their parents, maybe their uncles, aunties. But for me, I’m just pretending. That's why I feel uncomfortable, like in Gulu especially. Once they know that thing, maybe I will be left alone - with no friends...

His negotiations with the boundaries that define his exclusion allow him to sometimes feel like a human being, like he belongs. He knows, however, that no matter what he does, his belonging will always be partial and limited.

In the next section I look how this finding, that the children are political actors engaged in politics of belonging from the micro to macro levels, contributes to our understanding of children born of war.

109 It may be worth noting, however, that his only contacts on the platform are myself, my son, another Westerner, the mother of another participant in the project, and two other children in this study.
8.3 Implications for Conceptualizing Children Born of War

As children of forced marriages in a non-state armed group, the stories of children born into the LRA provide a comprehensive look into the subjective experiences of being a child born into the complex and violent social and political worlds that enabled such sexual violence. This section will highlight how the findings of this dissertation contribute to current conceptualizations of children born of war. Specifically, I suggest that, as with the children in northern Uganda, children born of war are both political figures and actors and their actions and experiences are best understood within historical and multi-levelled systems and structures. This conceptualization also proposes that the children’s ongoing exclusion highlights the importance of work targeting the macro-level narratives about the conflicts from which children are born. I will conclude this section with some insights that offer optimism that such change is possible.

Feminist scholars (McClintock, 1996; Mama, 1999; Enloe, 2000) insist that current dynamics of oppression and violence in postcolonies must be understood as rooted in the gendered process of colonialism. Chapter Three demonstrated this lineage in Uganda from colonial structures to the war in the north. Recognizing that these power structures are inherently gendered, this dissertation points to the significant role of patriarchy as a hierarchy of power established through colonialism and traces its role in shaping, in particular, the marginalization of certain groups of people (such as the Acholi). Expanding this finding to other contexts suggests that the exclusion experienced by children born of war is best understood when we recognize the gendering of such politics of belonging, which involves paying attention to the
masculinization of state apparatus, the patriarchal structures of colonizing processes, the paternalism of nation-building, the deployment of women’s sexuality in nation-building,\(^\text{110}\) and the ubiquity of militarized hypermasculinity in conflict societies.

Current literature about children born of war argues that the discourse about sexual violence in conflict has been inadequate at both addressing the needs and rights of the children and approaching them as subjects of research (Watson, 2007; Carpenter, 2010; Seto, 2013; Denov, 2015; Theidon, 2015). This scholarship tends to point to the legal conceptualization of wartime rape as a critical source for these shortcomings. As Seto (2013) writes, “[T]hese children are excluded from the discourse on war rape because their identities fail to fit within the frameworks used to understand sexual violence” (p. 210). This thesis has suggested that approaching the children as political actors and figures involved in politics of belonging, offers the potential for research of children born of war to move beyond the constraints of the above formulations of sexual violence. By connecting the children’s micro-level experiences with contemporary and historical macro-level processes of exclusion, the children’s experiences are not only their mother’s rape, but of larger systems and structures of oppression. Situating their experiences within this wider frame of reference raises questions of accountability and responsibility, and suggests that governments bear significant responsibility for the welfare of the children.

Existing scholarship has also suggested that failing to effectively involve children born of war in “the knowledge framework used to inform post-conflict experiences” (Watson, 2007, p. 30) can result in unresolved issues in recovering societies (Carpenter, 2007; Goodhart, 2007;

\(^{110}\) Such constructions of women’s sexuality reflect also the heteronormativity of colonial, neocolonial, and nation-building processes (Mohanty, 2006).
McEvoy-Levy, 2007; Watson, 2007). For example, scholars have suggested that failure to include children born of war in frameworks of reconstruction can contribute to limited reconciliation (DeLaet, 2007) and generational conflict (Harris Rimmer, 2007), ongoing gender-based violence (Harris Rimmer, 2007), and inadequate security norms and structures (Watson, 2007). This dissertation posits that the stories of children born of war analyzed within a framework of politics of belonging offers new ways of understanding the post-conflict society they now inhabit – how people cope and how the impact of the war continues in profoundly problematic ways even many years since becoming officially post-conflict (Galtung 2001; Nordstrom 1996; Lubkemann 2008). As I have argued, the exclusion of the children at the interpersonal and local level reflects a lack of social and cultural resources to welcome them. Scholars who have written on the subject, (Carpenter, 2010; Daniel-Wrabetz, 2007; Erjavec & Volcic, 2010a; Mochmann, 2008) insist that global norms must change in order to combat the taboo around the topic of children born of war that keep it from being prioritized in human rights agendas. Some (Apio, 2007; Erjavec & Volcic, 2010a; 2010b; Denov & Lakor, 2017) have argued that local attitudes must change for the children to be accepted. As this thesis has demonstrated, children born of war embody the transgressions and violence of the war in communities that are struggling to recover. For the children, however, their exclusion is a continuation of the violence of war, only manifested in different ways. In both senses – from the perspective of those who enforce the boundaries that exclude, and that of the children - “positive peace” (Galtung 1996) remains elusive. “Concerns about negative peace are also applicable to the current case,” writes Grace Maina (2011, p. 11) about Uganda, “as observers, scholars, and practitioners fear that northern Uganda can revert back to war if the root challenges of this conflict are not ad-
dressed.” As a reflection of the current dynamics, this dissertation suggests that the inclusion/exclusion of children born of war serves as a measuring stick for evaluating the wellbeing of their society.

Children born into the LRA are political actors negotiating the forces shaping the boundaries of their exclusion as they navigate toward better life positions. Despite their best efforts, however, they manage only a partial belonging. The long-term nature of this study has led me to speculate that their exclusion will follow them into their adulthood. Considered more broadly to include children born of other conflict situations, their belonging seems contingent on changing the narrative about their past. As this study and others have shown, children born of war largely experience their exclusion at the micro-level, and recommendations in current literature often conclude that local initiatives are the solution to encourage their inclusion (Carpenter, 2007; 2016; Denov & Lakor, 2017). The example in Chapter Four of inclusion of children born into the LRA in churches suggests that local leaders can play an important role.

The inclusion of children born of war involves negotiating with political forces. The case of northern Uganda, for example, suggests that recognition at the national level as legitimate Acholi victims could establish an important basis for the acceptance of children born into the LRA – as victims of the gendered violence inherent in the national politics of belonging, as described above. This would involve public acceptance of responsibility for the harms experienced by the children’s mothers and the challenges of the children. In their study with adolescent girls born of war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Erjavec and Volcic (2010b) concluded with a similar national level framing of the children: “[T]he fate of these adolescents is not solely the

111 An exception to only micro-level exclusion would be the denial of citizenship.
result of their ongoing stigmatization but is caught up in the ongoing legacy of the macrolevel social consequences of the war” (p. 382). More theoretically, Seto (2015) argues that because children born of war were created as part of a strategy of war and because they are subsequently strategically negated from political attention, they expose the reliance of modern governance on the marginalization of certain populations. The chapters in this dissertation cumulatively support this macro-level concern. In this case, the exclusivist nature of governance targeted the Acholi and kept the region largely omitted from national development and protection, which then informed the exclusion of children born into the LRA as an effort to rebuild after the war.

Local non-governmental ongoing efforts to change the narrative on the ground nevertheless suggest some improvements. For over a decade, JRP has led sensitization efforts in communities to educate about reconciliation and transitional justice and to advocate for the needs of the war-affected and mothers of children born into the LRA, in particular. Recently, the only organization that works exclusively on behalf of children born in captivity, Watye ki Gen, has begun implementing sensitization efforts specific to the needs of the children born into the LRA. The organization has been to schools to educate general student populations on acceptance and it occasionally brings together some of the children born into the LRA or their mothers for meetings to discuss problems they face. According to one mother in this study, with regards to a particular situation of stigma her child experienced, the organization encouraged the children to come together in their school to advocate for their rights as a group. The school group raised concerns about discrimination and reported incidents of violence against them to the school administration. There is evidence that such efforts may be changing the narrative on the ground. One boy described to me the transformations he has witnessed in Gulu since the end of the war:
I think a lot of sensitization has been happening - educating people about things and matters about apology, this forgiveness thing, amnesty and all that.\textsuperscript{112} So people have really been trying and understanding a bit and up to now, and here a lot of people have changed… And the most important thing is it's peaceful, there's peace now, there's nothing like war. So that's the most important thing.

Recommendations for significant sensitization programs have been made in each of the reports about children born into the LRA (Stewart 2015; Mclain Opiyo 2015; Ladisch 2015; Watye ki gen 2015). Despite the increasing unrest in Gulu,\textsuperscript{113} such statements give reason for optimism that the children’s exclusion will continue to be challenged, not just by the children, but importantly, throughout their communities as a result of such sensitization efforts.

Efforts to change the national response to children born into the LRA, however, have proven more difficult, reflecting the magnitude of the structural and systemic transformation that some have suggested is required to create conditions of inclusion for children born of war (Goodhart, 2007; McEvoy-Levy; Watson, 2007; Seto, 2013; 2015). In a recent conversation with one boy in the study, I learned that he had been taken to Kampala by an NGO to speak on behalf of children born into the LRA at an event attended by NGO and government officials, as well as the British High Commissioner. He said he had been instructed to explain the stigma and poverty that children like him face. He told me that he chose instead to focus on urging those in attendance to take action:

I told them to take action instead of every time calling for dialogue but no action is taken to prevent and support this kind of situation children born in captivity are going through. And the bad part of all this, children are living with their mothers and where

\textsuperscript{112} The notion of forgiveness in northern Uganda is formalized by the Amnesty Act, in which political insurgents were granted official pardon for their participation in the conflict. Amy Finnegan (2010) documents how Acholi religious leaders prioritized forgiveness, while the decades of suffering endured by the Acholi people created the social will to choose forgiveness over retributive forms of justice.

\textsuperscript{113} Recalling from Chapter Four, Gulu has been experiencing increasing civil tensions and violence in recent years. Poverty and unemployment is worsening, land disputes and gambling are widespread, and mob justice and gun violence have become semi-regular occurrences.
will they live when their mother is not there? And I told them that if they are not serious, these are the next rebels to become in the future. And I also told them the major problem they are facing is also stigma but I continued by saying stigma is like a disease and it is also more painful, like losing your beloved child or wife if you are married. And they should also consider stigma as driving people to be rebelling in the street… But these people just like calling for dialogue but few action is ever taken after… [I]t is not good for them to tell somebody that action is going to be taken but nothing is done. But even the law has been set but no action is being taken to follow it.¹¹⁴ That makes it more painful.

Historical research about children born of war offers pathways for changing national attitudes and ultimately the wellbeing of the children. Sabine Lee (2011) highlights some effective methods undertaken by the West German government to integrate ‘GI-children’: government-driven re-education targeting the attitudes that result in discrimination, academic discourse, public debate, and media attention. “Dialogue,” as the boy above points out, is not enough to effect change and local efforts are inadequate. This failure to act in any meaningful way to improve the lives of children born into the LRA suggests that the will is not present to prioritize the issue. Structural change requires the renegotiation of political forces, as well as the relationship between the state, society, and the children. The depth of the problem echoes both the theoretical conceptualization of children born of war put forward by Seto (2013; 2015) and the findings of this dissertation, which argue that children born of war are political figures engaged in

¹¹⁴ The law he is referring to is the resolution passed in Parliament in April 2014 after a petition was presented to the Parliament of Uganda by the Women’s Advocacy Network (WAN) in February 2014 and a motion was tabled by an Acholi Member of Parliament. The responding resolution called for a series of measures to support the needs of people affected by the conflict in the north. A three-person committee was created to follow up on the implementation of the resolution. The resolution included recognition of the unique needs of children born into the LRA. It recommends funding for their education, in addition to provision of sensitization training for teachers. It also recognizes the need to support efforts to “identify, integrate and resettle child victims of formerly abducted women whose clans, social, tribal and cultural belongings are unknown” (cited in Stewart, 2015, p. 7).
macro- and micro-level politics of belonging and are symbolically used to define belonging in their post-conflict nation and communities.

8.4 Directions for future research

Children born into the LRA are children born of war. More specifically, they are children born of forced relations in a non-state armed group, or “children of child soldiers” (Mochmann, 2008). Further empirical research is needed both in Uganda and in the many under-researched conflict zones areas around the world to understand their lives and how best to support them. In this section I will recommend several directions for future research both in Uganda and beyond. First, the research for this dissertation was based in the largely urban area of Gulu town and did not include voices of children who have been growing up in rural settings. Further research is thus needed to include voices of children from rural areas in northern Uganda, particularly since anecdotal evidence (such as Ian-Anzo’s story about the boy killed in a village in Chapter Four, as well as the rejections by their maternal families in the villages) and reports (McClain Opiyo, 2015; Ladisch, 2015; Watye ki gen, 2015) suggest that rural experiences of exclusion of children born into the LRA are more extreme. Stories from both urban and rural children will provide a more comprehensive and prescriptive analysis from a different spatial location.

Second, research on children born into the LRA has been geographically focused on northern Uganda, likely because of relative ease of access to this now post-conflict region. Yet, hundreds of such children live in neighbouring DRC with their Congolese mothers. Their fathers, however, are Acholi LRA soldiers. In a footnote in Chapter Four, I related the story of
James the social worker who worked with these children for two years in northeastern DRC. He was concerned that their paternal Acholi identities caused tension in not only the children’s lives, but also their communities in the DRC. The children often spoke Acholi to each other, as a secret language with which James seemed to fear they would use to agitate those around them. James also noted that because they are culturally Acholi (because identity is paternal in both Zande and Acholi cultures), the Acholi bear responsibility for their wellbeing and this should also be reflected in their citizenship. Studying this issue would contribute to our understanding of the role of language and ethnic and national identity in the politics of belonging of children born into the LRA.

Third, questions remain about how the children’s identities will affect their adult lives and also the lives of their children. Conducting research over a long period has led me to suspect that negative consequences of their identities and pasts (including stigmatization and poverty) will most likely follow them into their adulthoods. The intergenerational impact remains unknown but is an important aspect to document and understand in terms of developing effective interventions and informing future efforts addressing children born of war in other contexts.

Fourth, comparative research is needed to understand the impact of variables in the lives of children born of war across contexts (such as, but not limited to, the ethnic identity of the father, the mother’s relationship to the father; patrilineal or matrilineal cultural identity, the child’s exposure to armed conflict, access to education). Through my own research, I can identify characteristics that differentiate children born into the LRA from those of other children of child soldiers. The integral position of the children within the LRA’s political project of nation-building, for example, as well as the familial units and strict governance of relationships are
some of these features that distinguish the LRA from other groups. Also notable is that the children were (mostly) born to Acholi parents and raised in the bush as Acholi, the same culture and language as the place they transitioned to. These particular characteristics of the LRA have affected the children in ways that are distinct from the experiences of children born into other armed groups, but further empirical research is needed to document and analyze such lives before a meaningful comparative assessment can be made. Such comparative research can then contribute to knowledge about the similarities and differences to be accounted for when developing interventions for children born of war more broadly. With reports of neglect and rejection across categories and contexts of children born of war, evidence-based knowledge generated from empirical research is needed to develop effective and inclusive local, national, and international policy and programming aimed at the protection and positive integration of children born of war.

I recommend doing collaborative and longitudinal research with young people in contexts of adversity. Such research is important in a number of ways - to listen to the unique perspectives of children and youth as experts about their lives, to build trust and respect among participants and between participants and the researcher, and to capture their experiences in different life stages. Ethical and meaningful longitudinal research with other populations of children born of war would add considerably to our understanding of not just their lives, but potentially about the process of reconstruction in post-conflict communities and nations.

Finally, in addition to the methodological direction offered by this study, I hope the conceptual framework can be a starting point for future analysis of research with children born of war. Significantly, the framework insists that the experiences of children born of war are lo-
icated historically and politically at both the micro and macro levels. By conceptually connecting the politics of belonging with nation-building and hegemonic masculinity, the analysis of experiences and perspectives of children born of war can make recognizable both the boundaries and forces demarcating their social locations and also their agency as they negotiate the structures of their exclusion to navigate their social worlds to better life positions.
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Appendices

Appendix A: The Children

Karen
Date of birth: 1995
Karen is her mother’s first born when she was 15 years old. She transitioned out of the bush with her mother. Her father, a top commander, died from illness when she was five. Karen is now a mother herself and lives with her child and her mother at the family home of her stepfather’s on the outskirts of Gulu. In 2016, she was hoping to finish a two-year vocational training program. Her mother is a tailor and used to sew for a NGO, but now takes small sewing jobs in town. She knows her paternal family but does not have contact.

Emmanuella
Date of birth: 1996
Emmanuella is her mother’s first born. Her father, a Major, died the year after she was born. She transitioned out of the bush with her mother and two half-siblings. All three children have different fathers. When her stepfather also returned, the rehabilitation centre gave them a small home on the outskirts of Gulu where she now lives with her mother and siblings. Emmanuella is in her final year of a primary school teacher education program with the help of a sponsor. She has not yet managed to trace her paternal family.
**Shanny Flavia**

Date of birth: 1996

Shanny Flavia is her mother’s first born. She was captured by the Uganda People’s Defence Force (UPDF)\textsuperscript{115} she was eight years old with her mother and two full siblings.\textsuperscript{116} Her mother reported in 2013 that her father, a Lieutenant Colonel, had died. A report from 2016, however, claimed he was still alive. She lives with with her mother and siblings at her stepfather’s home on the outskirts of Gulu.

**Idro**

Date of birth: 1996

Idro is her mother’s first born when she was 15 years old. Idro was seven years old when she transitioned out of the bush with her mother and younger full sibling. They stayed in a rehabilitation centre for between seven to eight months because her mother’s family refused to accept them for fear they may be spiritually haunted. At the time of their transition, Idro’s father was a Major in the LRA. He was subsequently promoted before he died. Her mother is a tailor and sews from home, but previously had a contract to sew products for an NGO. In 2016, Idro was living with a man while she attended school to become a nursery teacher with the help of a sponsor. She knows her paternal family well and has stayed with them in the past, although they have not provided financial support.

\textsuperscript{115} The armed forces of Uganda.

\textsuperscript{116} By full sibling, I mean they have the same mother and father. At other points in the dissertation, I will refer to half-siblings in which they share either a mother or a father, but not both. The latter (same father) is most common due to the polygamous nature of marriage in the LRA.
**Lucy**

Date of birth: 1996

Lucy’s participation in the project has not been consistent and because her mother moved relatively far from Gulu, I have not had spoken to her mother since 2011 and Lucy was unavailable each time I visited since 2011, although she continued to participate in group meetings. Lucy’s father died in the bush. She transitioned out with her mother and younger half-sibling when she was five years old.

**Prudences**

Date of birth: 1996

Prudences is her mother’s first born when she was approximately 20 years old. Prudences was captured in 2004 during an ambush at the same time as her mother and two full siblings. She spent a month in hospital while her mother recovered from multiple gunshot wounds, helping care for her younger siblings. Her father is a top commander still at large. She secured a sponsorship for senior school. Her mother returned to her village in recent years after her contract with a for-profit NGO ended and continuing to live in town became impossible. Her mother has been responsible for one of her deceased brothers’ children. Prudences is close to her half-siblings (same father) and enjoys telling stories. She knows her father’s clan, but they have not accepted his children who were born in the bush.
Clarissa

Date of birth: 1997

Clarissa is her mother’s first born, when she was 14. She escaped with her mother and one of two full siblings in 2004 - the other sibling disappeared in the bush several months earlier. They spent four months in a rehabilitation centre while her mother recovered from health problems related to her time in captivity. Her father is a senior commander still in the bush. Clarissa has a sponsor for her secondary education.

Daniella Daisy

Date of birth: 1998

Daniella Daisy is her mother’s first born when she was approximately 14-16 years old. Daniella Daisy transitioned out of the war with her pregnant mother and full sibling when she was five years old. Her father was a Captain with three stars and was shot and killed in Sudan in 2006. LRA rebels killed Daniella Daisy’s maternal grandmother, who had been her only relative; she has no home village. They stayed in a rehabilitation centre for three months where her mother gave birth. While at the centre, Daniella Daisy’s paternal aunt visited them and gave her mother her phone number, but she lost it. Daniella Daisy, therefore, has no contact with her paternal family and does not know where they live. An NGO ended her mother’s contract in recent years, where she had worked as a tailor to sew bags. Daniella Daisy was dropped by her education sponsor in 2010 when she did not pass a class.
Hope

Date of birth: 1998

Hope is her mother’s first born when she was 15 years old. Hope’s father is a top commander still at large. His family has not welcomed her or her sibling, although their mother has met them. She transitioned out of the bush with her mother and full sibling when she was not yet six. Her mother’s family received them well, but they do not visit.

Modesta

Date of birth: 1998

Modesta is her mother’s first born; she was 15 years old. Modesta transitioned out of the bush with her mother and two siblings when she was almost six years old. All three children have different fathers. Modesta’s father was a 2nd Lieutenant and died in battle in 1998 before she was born. Her paternal family was finally traced in 2016, but they are not supportive. In 2016, she was living with a family where she worked as house help making 50,000 Ugandan shillings a month (less than $20 Canadian). She was never sponsored and did not finish primary school. Her mother’s contract with a for-profit NGO ended in 2014.

Grace

Date of birth: 1998

Grace’s participation in the project has not been consistent. I believe she is her mother’s second born. She transitioned out of the bush with her older half-sibling and mother when she was three years old. In 2014 she had a baby and now lives in a village far from Gulu. She has not
formally withdrawn from the project and we hope she can join one of the group meetings in the future.

**Keila**

Date of birth: 1999

Keila was her mother’s second born when she was 19 years old. Her younger sibling died in the bush. She was captured, along with her pregnant mother when she was almost five. They stayed in a rehabilitation centre for six months, where her sibling was born. Her mother’s family did not welcome her. She found a new husband but they were not welcome there, either. So they live in town. Keila’s father is a top commander still at large and his family has not made contact, although she knows where their home is. Her mother’s contract with a for-profit NGO ended in 2014 and she now sells charcoal. Keila has severe scarring from the accident that killed her brother, which causes her daily pain.

**Priscilla**

Date of birth: 1999

Priscilla was her mother’s first born, nine years after her abduction. Her mother was 19 year old when Priscilla was born. Priscilla was three and a half when she was captured by the Sudanese army and taken to Juba town before travelling to Uganda to a rehabilitation centre. Her mother escaped four months later and they were reunited at the centre. Her father, a Major, died in the bush. Priscilla lives with her mother, stepfather and young half-sibling in Gulu.
Cora

Date of birth: 2001

Cora is her mother’s third born. Her first born child died in the bush, six years before Cora was born. Cora’s father is a top commander still in the bush and she has no contact with his family. Her mother chose not to discuss details about their past with me. Cora is not sponsored.

Laura

Date of birth: 2002

Laura is her mother’s second born; she was 22 years old. Laura was born when her mother had been in captivity for 11 years. She and her older sibling were captured by the UPDF without their mother when Laura was two years old. She spent six months living with one of her mother’s co-wives before being moved to family. Her father is a senior commander still at large and she has no relationship with them. Laura’s mother returned later and she currently lives with her mother, three full siblings, and one half-sibling (same mother). During the war Laura’s maternal grandparents died and her mother is not welcome in her home. Laura has a partial sponsorship covering her school fees.

Staphany

Date of birth: 2002

Staphany is her mother’s second born; the first born was killed by a bomb. She was born nine years after her mother’s abduction at an unknown age. Staphany was captured in 2004 with
neither parent. She was then adopted by a co-wife of her mother’s. Her father is a top commander still in the bush and as of 2016, her mother is said to still be alive in the bush. She has some but minimal contact with her maternal family and no contact with her paternal family. She is sponsored to go to school.

**Junior**

Date of birth: 1996

Junior was his mother’s first born. Nothing is known about his mother. His mother, father, and only full sibling were shot and killed by the UPDF on the day they captured him. He stayed in a rehabilitation centre for six months until a woman came saying she was his maternal grandmother. He lived with her for seven years before another woman claimed she was his maternal grandmother. Unsure who was correct, social workers sent him to live with his paternal family. With the help of a sponsor, Junior is completing his secondary education. His maternal family remains unknown.

**David**

Date of birth: 1996 (approximately)

David was his mother’s first born. She had been abducted at the age of 13 and gave birth to David when she was 16. His father was a Major who died just four days David’s birth. David transitioned out of the bush with his mother and half-sibling who subsequently died from a disease he contracted while in captivity. They stayed in a rehabilitation centre for six months while his mother got treatment for her health condition related to her time in captivity. They
were received well by David’s maternal family, but he has not yet successfully traced his paternal family. His mother’s sewing contract with an NGO ended and she now sews piece work in a small market area.

**Joshua**

Date of birth: 1998

Joshua is his mother’s first born; she was 16. His father was a Lieutenant who died before he was born. Joshua was four years old when he and his mother were released. His mother’s family did not visit them until after three months when her mother came and took them to live with her. But two weeks later, his grandmother left them and never returned. Joshua’s paternal family has never been traced. He has partial sponsorship for his education.

**Timothy**

Date of birth: 1999

Timothy was born when his mother was in her early 20s. He was her second born. He was captured at the same time as his two full sibling and mother in when he was approximately four years old. His father is a senior commander still at large and Timothy has no contact with his family, although he knows where their village is. He lives in his mother’s village with his mother. She moved to her village after her contract with a for-profit NGO ended.


**Ian Anzo**

Date of birth: 1999

Ian Anzo is his mother’s first born; she was 19 years old. His father remains in the bush. He has four full siblings whom he lives with, except for one who did not manage to escape when their mother did. UPDF soldiers captured him and his full sister when he was five years old. His mother escaped later. He has some but minimal contact with his paternal family, although he has no access to land. His mother has no source of income, and buys and sells what she can. Ian Anzo has a partial sponsorship.

**Authar**

Date of birth: 1999

Authar is his mother’s second born. His older sibling died in the bush when he was young. He was transitioned out of the bush with his mother and younger full sibling. His father is a top commander still at large and he has minimal contact with his paternal family, although he knows their village. As of 2016, he had left school and was living at his maternal village doing small jobs for income.

**Emmy**

Date of birth: 1999

Emmy is his mother’s only child; she was 15 years old. He transitioned out of the bush with his mother and they spent four months in a rehabilitation centre. His father had escaped before them and reunited with them at the centre. His father is now at UPDF soldier. While his father
is most often out of the country, Emmy has a good relationship with his paternal uncle. His mother was received well by her family and they visit her village during holidays. His mother’s contract with an NGO ended and she now sews upon request for people in town.

**Innocent**

Date of birth: 1999

Innocent is his mother’s first born; she was approximately 15 years old at the time of his birth. His father was a Lieutenant and died shortly before they escaped. Innocent transitioned out of the bush with his full sibling and pregnant mother when he was four years old. When Innocent’s paternal family was traced, his father’s brother “inherited” his mother, which failed. While Innocent reports a poor relationship with his paternal family, his two full-siblings live at the paternal home with their grandfather. His mother used to sew for an NGO but now has no reliable source of income. He lives with his mother, two half-siblings, and his maternal grandmother in a crowded neighbourhood in Gulu.

**Julius**

Date of birth: 1999

RG is his mother’s second born child; she was approximately 19 years old when he was born. His father, a director, died when he was one week old. His siblings who were also born in captivity have different fathers. He escaped with his mother and siblings. His younger sibling’s father subsequently returned and reunited with them in the rehabilitation centre. RG lives on the outskirts of Gulu with his mother, siblings, and a new stepfather. He has a good relationship with his paternal family and spends time there during holidays, but they are unable to offer
financial support. His education has been disrupted due to lack of school fees. His mother used to work full-time at a for-profit NGO but by 2016, she was rarely called for work.

**Genesis**

Date of birth: 2000

Genesis is his mother’s second born. She was approximately 18 when he was born. Her first born died as an infant after a brief spell of diarrhea. When her first child’s father died, she was given to another man who was Genesis’ father, a Captain; he died before Genesis’ second birthday. He transitioned out of the bush when he was two and a half with his mother and stepfather, who is now with the UPDF. Until 2016, Genesis believed his stepfather was his biological father. His mother sews in town, but previously had a contract sewing for an NGO. He does not know his paternal family, but he hopes they will be traced.

**The Rock**

Date of birth: 2000

The Rock is his mother’s first born; she was approximately 16 years old. His background is unclear due to contradictory information. In 2011 and 2013, I was told that his father died in the bush and he escaped with his mother and full sibling when he was four years old. That version would mean that he now lives with his stepfather (a UPDF soldier), who would have been his mother’s husband after his father died. In 2014, The Rock told me he lives with his biological father and his mother confirmed this in 2016.
Cresent

Date of birth: 2001

Cresent is his mother’s first born; she was approximately 18 years old. His father, who had two stars, was killed in battle before he was born. Cresent transitioned out of the bush with his mother when he was three years old. His maternal family received them well but his paternal family has not yet been traced. His mother’s contract with a for-profit NGO ended and she has no reliable source of income. He lives with his mother and younger half-sibling on the outskirts of Gulu.

Richard

Date of birth: 2002

Richard is his mother’s third born. He transitioned out of the bush with his mother and two older siblings. His father returned shortly after and reunited with them and joined the UPDF as a soldier. His mother left his father who he does not see now. He has no contact with his paternal family, although he knows where they are. Richard’s mother has difficulty paying his school fees because her workplace, a for-profit NGO, has very little work for her.
Appendix B: Paintings

‘de l’Autre’

Figure 44

12”x12”
Mixed media on wood

Explanation, September 2016:

I spent the month of August back in northern Uganda. It's an uncomfortable feeling being the privileged outsider asking questions, gathering 'data', taking notes about what is so mundane to most but otherwise exceptional. But this should always be uncomfortable. This trip was just as much about maintaining relationships as it was about research, but the two are really the same, which contributes to my discomfort. Things are simpler with distinct boundaries but no relationship is ever so simple. Obvious binaries (West/Other, privileged/oppressed, white/black, colonizer/colonized, researcher/researched, etc.) relate, but power should never be so simply defined and divided. I find Camaroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe difficult
to understand. I sometimes get it, but then I lose my grasp once I try to articulate my understanding. What I think I can say is that he positions Africa beyond the all-encompassing construction of it as always postcolonial, and thus suggests a kind of amendment to postcolonial theory. Always seeing Africa as postcolonial keeps the entire continent locked within the colonial gaze as the tragic and impoverished entity that is forever resisting, simultaneously providing the West with a discourse about itself: “...aucun pensée du sujet ne saurait être complète qui oublie que le sujet ne s'apprehende que dans une distanciation de soi a soi et ne saurait s'éprouver que dans la reconnaissance de l'Autre” (Mbembe 2000, VIII). His alternative positions Africa as dynamic and complex, a postcolony rather than postcolonial. I think that's the general idea. I think. One thing I noticed during my visit was the increase in corruption. Of course, corruption exists in relation to many other things such as unemployment, poverty, insecurity, distrust, and so on. You need a lot of money to get a job in Gulu. Or to be let free when you've been wrongly imprisoned. And the impossible endless fee demands from schools is a legitimized form of corruption. And if anything goes wrong you're quickly assumed to be guilty of corruption. A vicious cycle rupturing relationships. Mbembe discusses power and corruption in the postcolony and I've returned to him for help understanding it. This painting was created in the midst of working through these emotions, reflections, and new ideas. The text is taken from something I read earlier this year. At the time, it seemed to make a lot of sense in relation to my data. But being 'in the field' challenges theory and frameworks of understanding, particularly Western ones.
‘Here’

Figure 45

12”x12”
Mixed media on wood

Explanation, October 2016:

‘What the hell am I doing here?’ is a question I kept asking myself during my last trip to Uganda. I mean, I know what I was doing there, but on a bigger more ethical scale, I struggle with it. Another recent painting, 'de l'Autre', reflected on the impossibility of clear and distinct boundaries and the messiness of power. This new painting speaks to my role as the white colonial researcher helping/studying the 'poor African children'. I'm always questioning the validity and value of my presence and my research. This painting reflects my flux of emotions when I consider this question.
‘resistance II’

Figure 46

10”x10”
Acrylic on wood

Explanation, November 2016:

I was personally hit by corruption happening at the local level in Uganda recently - clever theft involving email hacking and fake IDs. It's so frustrating and left me with a feeling of helplessness, but I'm so lucky it's not my norm. I've been thinking a lot about what leads to this kind of normal. This painting was done over several days as I was coming to terms with it all. An aspect of what has moved me in all of this is reflected in this piece - the persistence (resilience?) of those who live in this normal and yet who maintain clear moral boundaries. Perhaps 'resistance' is the best term.

Something more significant is going on than just theft, scamming, and bribes. It's of course linked to larger systems of power – liberalization of governance, colonialism/imperialism, capitalism – that postcolonies (using Mbembe's term again) are entangled in. Mbembe suggests that postcolonies are caught up in a kind of parallel world order that is a “caricature
of liberalisation” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2006). Maybe, however, the division between lawfulness and lawlessness (as understood within a is not so clear cut and the West is actually instead evolving toward the Global South, as some suggest.

It is the so-called margins, after all, that often experience tectonic shifts in the order of things first, most visibly, most horrifically. (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2006)

Once again, I'm back to challenging my Western assumptions, as with other recent paintings. But what of this persistence to maintain a clear division between lawlessness and lawfulness, the resistance to lawlessness? How tied to the neoliberal world is it? I prefer to see it more as a human tendency to choose love over hate (yes, corny). And maybe that's why, to me, it's kind of beautiful. But maybe that's just my privileged lens....

(The above was written before the American election. I would add now that the election may, in fact, be evidence of the above.)
‘Refuge’

12”x12”
Mixed media on wood

Explanation, November 2016:

In my research, I write a lot about belonging. Michael Ignatieff (the politician/intellectual) has written a lot about belonging, particularly in terms of the nation: “where you belong is where you are safe; and where you are safe is where you belong” (1994, p. 24). We often say 'home' is where we belong. Indeed, it is usually where we feel safe. But 'home' is an affective place – we are at home when we feel a sense of belonging. Lately when I think about this, I think of Warsan Shire's deeply affective poem 'Home.' What happens when the place where you feel a sense of belonging is no longer safe?

no one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark.

I was asked to think about 'refuge' and then paint about it. I considered what that word means to me in my life, which is inevitably informed by my research. To me, 'refuge' and 'home' are interdependent but different. Refuge, however, is where you feel safe… you can see how these terms (refuge, home, belonging) start to get tangled up.
no one leaves home until home is a damp voice in your ear saying leave, run now, i don't know what i've become.

Here, Shire refers to another element in the mess: identity. Home and where we belong are central to the question, Who am I? But Shire's 'I' is lower case, reflecting the simultaneous loss of identity with the loss of home. I tried to capture this tangled mess, along with the affective nature of these terms. Most significantly, I tried to capture the human perseverance to find refuge, home, belonging, and identity.
‘Ways of knowing’

Figure 48

10”x10”
Mixed media on wood

Explanation, October 2016:

“The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world's colonized peoples. It is a history that still offends the deepest sense of our humanity… It galls us that Western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that it is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with some of us.” - Linda Tuwihai Smith in Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples

I love this book. I love how it forces me to question and confront my motivations. It's not an enjoyable process. I returned to this book as I struggle(d) with my presence and research in Uganda and now as I work with the 'data' I collected – to nurture (not quite the right word!) resistance to my colonial ways of knowing, which is important not just in research, but also as a consumer of it. This painting came out of re-engaging with this book.