1 Joseph Kony and one of his surviving senior commanders, Okot Odhiambo, posing for photographs in Ri-Kwangba. This picture was taken on 12 June 2006, shortly after Kony finished his sit-down television interview (see Chapter 6). Seated below are Ben Achellam (left) and Santo Alit. Achellam was reportedly killed as an ally of Vincent Otti in the LRA leadership struggle in autumn 2008. Alit was reportedly killed in autumn 2009 in the Central African Republic, where he had been part of Kony's protection group. Alit had briefly been in Juba as part of the official LRA delegation to the Juba peace talks (Mareike Schomerus).

The Lord's Resistance Army
myth and reality

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Koen Vlassenroot

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4 · An African hell of colonial imagination? The Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, another story[1]

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Wars are partly what the media make them (Allen and Seaton 1999: 3). Not surprisingly, in the international media the consensus has been that the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Acholiland, northern Uganda, fights for some bizarre and mysterious reasons. 'I will use the Ten Commandments to liberate Uganda,' a headline from *The Times* declares, quoting Joseph Kony, the LRA leader. 'As we walk into the dark, airless jungle clearing after 12 days of increasingly arduous travel,' the author Sam Farmar writes in the article that follows, 'I understand how Stanley must have felt when he finally tracked down Livingstone.'[2] As many journalists before him have, Farmar refers to nineteenth-century travelogue mythology and other familiar markers to once again reproduce a contemporary version of 'that African hell of colonial imagination', to borrow Whitehead's (2004: 16) fitting description.

Despite Farmar's presence at the interview between Mareike Schomerus and Joseph Kony described in Chapters 5 and 6, his writing mirrors years of repeated (media) truths on Kony and his rebels: 'The LRA combined the fanaticism of a cult with ruthless military efficiency,' Farmar writes, 'and while its apparent aim was to impose the Ten Commandments on Uganda, its means could scarcely have been more evil.' Journalist Matthew Green (2008: 316), for his part, tells the story of his editor at Reuters in London who ordered him to restructure his news piece to get 'the bit about the Ten Commandments up high'. In producing persons like Joseph Kony and Alice Lakwena, opposition in northern Uganda was now at 'its most bizarre', wrote Woodward (1991: 181), an academic, while journalist Catherine Bond concluded that Alice Lakwena was 'a voodoo priestess and a former prostitute' and Catherine Watson, also a journalist, summarized the war as one between Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni and 'the primitive challenge' (both quoted in Omara-Otunnu 1992: 457f.). More recently, De Temmerman (2001: 51) has written of the 'savage world' where Kony is the absolute ruler. And in December 2006, some months after Farmar presented his account in *The Times*, Museveni gave the LRA a new epithet – 'Satan's Resistance Army'.[3]

After more than two decades of war, the LRA's extreme violence against civilians and their notorious mass abduction of minors into the fighting ranks have become dominant issues in the debate. The movement is now world infamous for its war crimes and crimes against humanity, and its leaders are wanted by the International Criminal Court (Allen 2006; Branch 2007b). Still, over the years there has been a rather one-sided focus on the religious and cosmological, even pseudo-cultural, aspects of the war, described by Karlström as 'a tragically suicidal popular uprising in northern Uganda' and 'a mass movement of collective moral expiation and salvation' (2004: 598). Consequently, as most observers, and academics, have dismissed the LRA on moral grounds, they have also disqualified the movement as resolutely non-political (Branch 2005: 7). True, the war has become an end in itself, with violence reinforcing further violence, and numerous actors with various agendas – indeed, as described by Nordstrom (1997: 37), a global 'warscape' that by now has expanded, geopolitically, far beyond the scope of this chapter. This fact may contradict any political rationale for which the LRA claims to be fighting. The challenge is, of course, to see whether any claimed political rationale for fighting has resonance with issues relevant to most people in Acholiland, despite the rebels' violent military tactics on the ground.

Thus, it is a heterogeneous, fragmented and very complex reality of which I will relate only one aspect, complementary to the other contributions to this volume. Some readers may find it provocative that I do not follow the common trend that concludes that the LRA are rebels without a cause, led by Joseph Kony, who is 'possessed by spirits' and who 'seemed to have no other aim than to terrorise his own ... people' (Allen 2007b: 147). Or, according to Prunier in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, a movement with 'bizarre syncretic beliefs'. In *Le Monde Diplomatique* we again read about the biblical theme of rebel leader Joseph Kony. 'His only political programme is observance of the Ten Commandments and opening of a Bank of Uganda in Gulu.'[4] In an interview in the *New Vision*, the Ugandan state-controlled daily, Prunier simply concludes that the LRA rebels are 'mad',[5] and more recently, in an academic analysis, he again describes them as a 'bizarre syncretic and millenarian movement' (Prunier 2004: 359). Chabal and Daloz, for their part, admit that the LRA may have a political dimension to their religiously motivated violence, but still conclude that their 'millenarian agenda places them firmly outside the political and criminal organizations' they find relevant to examine (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 86).

So, when it comes to any political rationale of the LRA, the story very

much ends where I will start my assessment. I base my account on more than ten years of anthropological commitment to northern Uganda, with intermittent fieldwork periods starting from 1997, against which I have balanced my reading of the literature on Uganda. Throughout my years of research, I have neither seem the claim about a bank office in any LRA document nor heard of it in any of their statements, but rather than being something we may ridicule, it can be noted that today even Barclays has opened an office in northern Uganda, connecting previously disconnected Ugandans to the outside world and its wider developments. I have encountered intelligible manifestos and documents which outline the LRA's *political* grievances, and my examination of some of these documents will indicate a direction alternative to those more commonly narrated. My story is basically a story of marginalization and exclusion in the context of Uganda's wider development from the colonial days to the present. Here Fithen and Richards's note on the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone also says something about the LRA. 'Collapse into fatalistic violence and random killing is a development which might have been foreseen by opponents of the RUF,' they note, 'had they been less busy denying the movement's reasons to exist' (2005: 123).

I first encountered an LRA manifesto in 1997, a tattered one-page ten-point programme. Some ten years later, with peace talks held in Juba (South Sudan) that started in 2006 but ended some two years later, my file with LRA written statements has grown big. This is basically also the time frame that I cover in this chapter. Some LRA documents have been given to me by diaspora contacts in Sweden and the UK, a few I have downloaded from the Internet – often copies of documents circulating on the ground – but most of them have actually been shown to me during fieldwork in Uganda, by people who put their trust in me despite a situation of severe state oppression. There is a clear continuity in claims put forward in the LRA documents that I have gathered over the years, and I will present something of a rarity in the academic literature on the war in northern Uganda. My narrative will also function as an implicit chronology.

I have mainly worked with young adults in their twenties and early thirties, who were internally displaced to squalid camps or towns. Some I have followed in their struggles for education for several years now, others in their small-scale businesses or farming. Some have left or escaped from the rebel side, but the majority of my informants, one could perhaps say, have been semi-urban non-combatants. Given that I am a male anthropologist, my material, I have to admit, has a cer-

tain male bias. I have also interviewed rebel supporters, and interacted with former LRA commanders, both in Uganda and in the European diaspora, as well as with LRA representatives to the Juba peace talks. Over the years, I have also followed Ugandan and international media and popular reporting on the war, of which I will give a few examples as well, before I proceed to discuss the political rationale of the LRA in manifestos and Ugandan understandings. To contextualize my argument better, I will start with a brief background.

The debated background

Joseph Kony's group, today known as the LRA, can be said to be a successor to Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Movement, but over time it has incorporated elements from other rebel factions as well (Allen 2006; Branch 2005; Doom and Vlassenroot 1999; Finnström 2008a). My informants differentiated between two dimensions of armed resistance in northern Uganda: the initial, politically motivated insurgency groups and the spiritually motivated groups that emerged slightly later, such as Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Forces. The first dimension of the resistance they called 'the army of the earth' (*mony me ngom*) and the second 'the army of heaven' (*mony me polo*). It is obvious that the Juba peace talks between the LRA and the Ugandan government opened the space for the rebels' 'earthly' dimension to be better heard than ever before, but I would still prefer to describe the 'earthly' and 'heavenly' aspects of the insurgency campaigns as parallel intertwined aspects of the same fragmented war reality. War evolves over time, and at some moments in history one facet dominates over the other, and of course it all depends on whom you ask, how you ask and when you ask.

Allen (1991b) and Behrend (1999a) have delineated the religious and cosmological aspects of the rebel movements in Acholiland, while Lamwaka (1998, 2000, 2002) has written invaluable accounts of the politically motivated rebel factions of the early years, such as the Uganda People's Democratic Movement/Army (UPDM/A). Nyeko and Lucima have provided brief profiles of the parties to the conflict (Nyeko and Lucima 2002), and Onyango-Odongo has written background to the conflict from a local historian's viewpoint (Onyango-Odonga 1998).

There are basically two strands in the virulent debate about the origin of the conflict. One claims that people from northern Uganda initiated the rebellion in an effort to regain the state power they lost when Museveni captured Kampala in 1986 (Gersony 1997: 14). To recapitulate the argument, two governments led by Ugandans from the north (Milton Obote was from Lango, and Tito Okello was an Acholi) followed in

the wake of Idi Amin (of Kakwa origin, from the West Nile region in north-western Uganda). With Museveni's takeover, the presidency was handed over to a Ugandan from the south (Museveni is a Munyankole), and this, it has been suggested, people from the north simply could not accept (e.g. Ottemoeller 1998).

A complementary and more contextual version pinpoints the realities that developed on the ground in northern Uganda. There, rape and other forms of physical abuse aimed at non-combatants became the order of the day after Museveni's and his National Resistance Army's (NRA) military takeover. Torture and maltreatment became common. Thousands of suspected rebels were taken into detention. Amnesty International reports a consistent pattern of army- and government-sponsored executions (Amnesty International 1992; see also Branch 2007a). The main remaining insurgency group, the LRA, has retroactively given their perspective on the situation: 'The NRA did to us what the Turk slave hunters did to us in the 19th century. They both treated us like animals, with contempt and open abuse; devastated our land, social infrastructure, decimated our culture and drove us out of our homes, into the bushes and hills' (Lord's Resistance Army/Movement 1996a). As had been the case already during the colonial days, northern Uganda became effectively excluded from economic and political developments going on in other parts of Uganda, notably the central south (Omara-Otunnu 1995: 230).

Nevertheless, the war has frequently been described as one of those bizarre African wars that really cannot be comprehended, and obviously the LRA, because of their gross violence on the ground, has became a co-author in the process. This is a paradox of life, but again, there is more to the story than that. Well aware of this powerful version of the situation, LRA supporters and others with knowledge of LRA manifestos were often careful when they expressed their views in the public arena, and it took quite some time for me to gain their confidence so that they could freely share their feelings, views and ideological standpoints. Without being able to provide any proper or final statistics, I want to question the conclusion by Gersony that of the Acholi people in the most immediate war zone, 'more than 90% do not respect, welcome, encourage, support or voluntarily assist the LRA' (Gersony 1997: 59). Another consultant concludes that he 'could find no one in Acholi who would admit to having any sympathy for the LRA as such'.[6] But frankly, who would welcome war? And who would openly admit support for the LRA or their predecessors, as it is possible, even likely, that such public support could result in treason charges? With this in mind, I suggest that there is a measure available to assess the above figures.

In the 1996 and 2001 presidential elections, fewer than 10 per cent of the voters in the north supported Museveni and his government; in 2006 some 16 per cent did so. In all three campaigns, state-sponsored intimidation and open violence were rampant. The number of people who have welcomed Museveni's rule, then, is basically as small as the number who welcomed the LRA.

Fragments of non-understanding

A documentary called *The Mission* from 1998, screened in various European countries, is a good illustration of Western visions of wars in Africa. Towards the end of the film, the viewer is presented with low-quality archival video material of the LRA from the peace talks in 1993/94, which eventually failed. The film provides no information about these talks. Joseph Kony at one point addressed invited elders for three hours during the talks. According to one elder who attended, Kony wanted to make sure that the LRA was received well by the community. 'He gave assignments to the elders to make all traditional arrangements for their return home,' the elder told me in 1998. Kony also spoke about previous peace talk failures and raised the sensitive issue of Mike Kilama and other high-ranking rebels who accepted an amnesty in the 1980s, only to die in unclear circumstances, some while imprisoned by the Ugandan government. The untimely deaths of these former rebel commanders have remained a critical issue over the years (Lamwaka 1998: 157–8; Okuku 2002: 34–5), but the viewer of *The Mission* is left in ignorance of all this. Most of Kony's comments are presented without translation. Only parts of his speech to the team of peace negotiators are translated into English, and these parts almost exclusively concern his references to the Bible, but again no context is given to his comments. As with Farmar's story for *The Times*, there is no immediate logic comprehensible to the Western audience, only undirected fragments of *apparently* bizarre statements.

A more recent documentary film, *Invisible Children (Rough Cut)* from 2004, is a gripping documentation of the plight of children who, because of security concerns, including the fear of being abducted by the rebels, but also because humanitarian organizations give them food and shelter, trek from their rural homes to towns at night. With a potent Hollywood horror aesthetic framing the film, this film too falls short when the historical background and socio-political context are considered. Lacking photo material of the LRA, the film-makers use clippings from Kamajo (hunter) militia and child fighters in Sierra Leone. And when the rebel leader is depicted, besides recycling old and

low-quality photos, the film-makers use drawings. With its dramatic artistic dimension, the film fully plays with Eurocentric imaginations – not really Uganda, not really Sierra Leone, just imaginings of Africa. In the USA and beyond, just like Save Darfur, the Invisible Children movement has become a standing feature of humanitarianism and popular culture, for example in the Oprah Winfrey and Veronica Mars TV shows where it featured.

Other imaginings of Africa

The Ugandan army promotes itself as the rational and modern party to the conflict. The words of Museveni, who is also commander-in-chief of the army, are significant. With reference to the late Alice Lakwena and her Holy Spirit Mobile Forces, the predecessors of the LRA, Museveni has described the rebels in northern Uganda as nothing but criminals and murderers, or at best victims of primitive and primordial sentiments and perverted local religious traditions. 'The poor Lakwena girl was being manipulated by criminals who would intoxicate soldiers on marijuana,' and supporters of previous regimes were 'intoxicating poor peasants with mysticism and incredible lies' (Museveni 1997: 115). From his perspective, 'the Lakwena peasants' used 'mysticism instead of science' in their effort to fight his 'modern army' (ibid.: 116). References to primitive superstition and alleged drug abuse are used in an effort to deny any political dimension to the conflict. Instead 'obscurantism', 'witchcraft' and 'backwardness' are said to block modernization and development in Uganda (ibid.: 173).

Over the years, other influential individuals have tuned in to the propaganda of war. Major General James Kazini, one of the president's closest military associates, blames all military violence upon the Acholi. 'If anything, it is local Acholi soldiers causing the problems,' he claimed in an interview with Human Rights Watch. 'It's the cultural background of the people here: they are very violent. It's genetic' (Human Rights Watch 1997: 59). Thus Kazini takes the argument back to the days of the colonialists. As was the case then, the assumption is that the Acholi are primordially violent.

President Museveni and his associates' language of denigration has taken a symbolic dimension understandable to most Africans. Now and then, Museveni calls his opponents in arms 'hyenas'.[7] The metaphor of hyenas presents them as wild creatures, which in many African cosmologies means that they have vitality and power, but more, that they represent the uncultured wilderness, danger, depredation, death, sorcery and witchcraft. 'Hegemonic groups are able to define such a

vocabulary, an ability that enables them to identify opposition and protest as witchcraft, banditry, and terrorism,' writes Winans (1992: 110) with reference to south-central Tanzania on the eve of independence.

With a focus on the rebels' incomprehensible religious practices and gross abuses of basic human rights, and with the rebels themselves characterized as hyenas, terrorists and agents of Satan, but ignoring the Ugandan army's habitual misconduct, comprehensive peace talks for many years were repeatedly dismissed on moral grounds (e.g. Parliament of Uganda 1997). Ehrenreich, who chaired a Human Rights Watch report on the conflict, was less judgemental than the people quoted above but was still pessimistic. She noted that unlike, for example, the IRA of Northern Ireland, the LRA rebels 'have no "political wing", which make public pronouncements and negotiations difficult'.[8] One report to the United Nations concludes that the LRA 'lacks any clearly formulated political objective',[9] yet another that 'the LRA has no coherent political or other objectives'.[10] Instead it is concluded that the LRA follows a leader who 'has created an aura for himself and his organization of deliberate irrationality and obscurantism'.[11] Indeed, as Adam and colleagues have shown in a recent article (2007; see also Behrend 1999a; Titeca, this volume), the LRA's explicit use of Christian symbols and rituals, combined with testimonies from ex-rebels about the rebels' long praying sessions, have led many to portray the LRA as a Christian fundamentalist organization. Adam et al. present several examples of the LRA's ritual activities with Christian and biblical references, but at the same time they wisely add that one has to be careful with this analysis.

Again, this is only one side of the coin. During the years of evolving war, the political and socio-economic dimensions have developed as increasingly central issues of debate and contest in Uganda, particularly in the north of the country. Kayunga writes that it was only in the process of the evolving war that insurgents in northern Uganda framed their ambitions in terms of a struggle for multiparty politics and democracy, 'if only', as he holds, 'to win international sympathy and support' (Kayunga 2000: 112; see also Lord's Resistance Army/Movement 1997). In their documents, the LRA feeds on an increasing local discontent with neoliberal developments in Uganda, explicitly mentioning structural adjustment and other development measures demanded by the donor community. Today the programmes of structural adjustment and cost sharing have reached almost every sector of Ugandan society, particularly health and education. Young Acholi men and women, especially, often communicated to me their experience of being effectively denied Ugandan citizenship. 'Accountable democracy',

or 'participatory democracy', to repeat the commonly heard buzzwords of international development rhetoric, is defined by a government's ability to make certain services available to its citizens, such as clean water, food, healthcare and education. Such everyday democracy is generally not found in Acholiland. In the pre-war situation, livestock was sold now and then to pay school fees for young people, but the war has disrupted this and other foundations of income. In frustration, many young people desperately seek economic assistance. One young man wrote in a letter to me, 'My father who was struggling sponsoring for my fees was killed by the rebel force. That is why I got stuck on the way.'[12] The writer concludes that he can see only one option for the education he was forced to abandon. 'I will be compelled to join the rebel force to fight the Uganda People's Defence Forces [and the] government.' This is an example not of greed but of grievance in the absence of democracy and functioning state services (see Richards 2005b).

My young informants felt especially marginalized in their poverty. In their view, they are denied many of the most mundane and everyday aspects of citizenship, for example security, and, as some of my informants put it, 'freedom from oppression'. They feel disconnected from Uganda's wider developments, even future developments (see Ferguson 1999). One issue often emphasized by young people in Acholiland was the importance of including the northern region in Uganda's national development and national future – indeed, this is a theme frequently invoked in LRA statements and documents over the years. Yet the rebels do little to follow their own written endorsement of respect for democracy and human rights, a paradox pointing towards a rather complex reality on the ground. In the words of a young woman, 'I do not support the rebels, nor am I supporting the government. I am just in a dilemma. I would like to support the rebels, but they are killing my people.'[13] Norbert Mao, a politician from northern Uganda, has stated his opinion: 'We in northern Uganda also have our grievances against the LRA just as we have issues to sort out with the Ugandan government. But we can not denounce a good idea simply because it is coming from the LRA.'[14]

When you can do nothing ...

It is not relevant to analyse such seemingly perplexing questions in terms of logical inconsistency, or as irrational and uninformed, as this would indicate an inability among my informants to grasp the complexity of the war. The young woman's statement is typical of the wartime realities of people in northern Uganda, just as seemingly contradictory standpoints are common in every human setting. People often tried to

comprehend the discrepancy between the LRA's stated agenda and their violent military strategies on the ground. Sometimes they put forward very frank conclusions. In 2000, for example, 'David', a twenty-five-year-old unmarried teacher, out of frustration concluded that terrorist attacks, sometimes even against their own people, can be legitimate when no other options are open, when the political climate has stifled any oppositional effort, 'when you can do nothing'. He had never been a rebel himself, nor did he seriously think about joining them on the battlefield, but he still held that in an increasingly hostile political environment, 'the rebels are becoming more meaningful'. In late 1999, the LRA distributed their most developed manifesto so far, and elaborating upon what he saw as a new phase in the war, David continued that 'they are becoming more meaningful in the sense that they have been able to publish a manifesto, which they used not to have'.[15]

During my fieldwork in 2002, the language of young people had changed even more. Now and then I encountered urban young men, especially, who talked about the rebels as freedom fighters. 'These are', as one young man said, 'people called terrorists. The world knows them as terrorists.' With them labelled as terrorists, the man continued, for all these years the Ugandan government, with the silent approval of the outside world, has manhandled any person who has tried to initiate dialogue with the rebels. 'Which means', he further proposed, 'as long as they are terrorists in the bush, the people of Acholiland can continue to suffer. [...] Maybe the world sees them as a terrorist organization, for real, which they do not still see [themselves]. These are freedom fighters!'[16] Another young man added, with reference to the blanket amnesty offered to the rebels in 2000 but later, at least for the rebel leaders, overruled by the International Criminal Court's arrest warrants: 'To me, this amnesty, even if the president accepted it coactively, does not apply to rebels. Amnesty only applies to gangsters, robbers, or those kinds of bandits. But to a rebel who has a constitutional right to liberate his country – because these [rebels] call themselves liberators, they want to liberate the country – they don't see that they have done anything wrong.'[17] The discussion among my student informants went on and a third young man broke in, 'I think they have been very wise to know that the amnesty thing was bogus.'[18]

Senior LRA commanders, for their part, have consistently opposed any amnesty if it is not accompanied by political dialogue. From their perspective, when the amnesty law was introduced, to respond positively to it and ask for pardon was tantamount to a capitulation. 'We are not going to lay down our arms as long as Museveni is still in Uganda as president,

because the only language he understands is the one that comes from the barrel of the gun,' they wrote in a response to the amnesty law. 'We are not going to be intimidated or baited into compromise through the amnesty law because we have a clear agenda for fighting.'[19]

In the printed manifesto circulated on the ground in northern Uganda in 1999, a note attributed to the LRA leader Joseph Kony serves as a preamble to the political issues raised. The effort to deny the fundamentalist label is central (see also Schomerus, this volume). 'There have been misinformations about this Movement, its name, objectives, policies and even its entire membership including leadership,' Kony writes. The movement is for all Ugandans, he furthermore claims, and the term 'Lord' is explained as a simple thanks to the 'Heavenly Father' who has made it possible for the movement to resist Museveni's army, which nevertheless 'is always armed from tooth to nail'. The rebel leader continues, 'While a big percentage of the Movement's members are ordinary and Practicing CHRISTIANS, I would like to strongly deny that these members are or in any way have the intention of becoming Christian Fundamentalists' (Lord's Resistance Army/Movement n.d.). An LRA political commissary gave his version of the movement's name. 'The group constantly prayed and thanked God for keeping them alive,' he writes. 'In appreciation for the mercy and protection God had shown on them, these survivors gave the name LORD'S RESISTANCE MOVEMENT/ ARMY (LRM/A) to their liberation movement' (Lord's Resistance Army/ Movement 1997). The movement's spokespersons often try to distance themselves from the issue of the Ten Commandments, and the same argument is put forward in yet another rebel document. 'Serious reflection on moral codes and religion may help us now and in the future,' it is claimed. The document continues by saying, however, that prayers 'are not compulsory' and Uganda needs 'freedom of association and belief' (Lord's Resistance Army/Movement 1996a).

Versions of the reality

Most observers have dismissed rebel documents as inauthentic diaspora creations which bear no relation to Ugandan realities (e.g. Human Rights Watch 1997: 73, n. 85).[20] While ignoring the fact that the LRA's original peace delegation to Juba was actually appointed by the rebel high command itself, an influential think tank still concludes that the delegation is a diaspora creation that 'lacks competency, credibility, and cohesiveness'.[21] But the fact that the war in northern Uganda connects to global realities and the wider world, including the Ugandan diaspora, of course, should neither come as a surprise nor be dismissed. And

there can be no question that LRA political documents circulate on the ground in northern Uganda, which is where I encountered them in the first place. For example, when in 2000 I enquired among government officials in Gulu, the response was a solid denial of the existence of any LRA manifestos, past or present. As mentioned, however, in late 1999 the rebels had distributed a printed manifesto to religious and political leaders, and it soon attracted great interest from the public. Even representatives of some international NGOs who I knew had received copies denied this in interviews with me. One of the manifesto's main authors, who eventually left the rebel movement and thereafter told me his version, claimed that 2,000 copies were printed and distributed to several national and international NGOs as well as to foreign missions in Kampala. I have also documented that a number of Acholi who were known critics of the government, and therefore suspected of having copies, have perished in Ugandan prisons.

This fact gives a most real, lived dimension to the manifestos. An official discourse of denial is violently at play: not only is it denied that the LRA has manifestos, but people who dare to voice the contrary run the risk of being imprisoned. As reported by the Uganda Human Rights Commission (2003) and Human Rights Watch, (2004) a growing number of people countering the official line have been arrested on charges of treason or suspected terrorism, but denied court trials. Locked in army prisons or detention centres commonly known as 'safe houses', they have disappeared from public view. It is suspected that some have died in custody, under conditions that most of my informants find mysterious and 'bad', or in any case not natural. As mentioned, this was notably the case with rebel commander Kilama and others who surrendered, only to die. The fates of these individuals have had a profound impact on Acholi people, who remember the violent rule of Idi Amin in the 1970s.

Friends in northern Uganda have told me how they occasionally have been stopped at rural roadblocks manned by the rebels. After hasty political lectures by the roadside, they have been given written manifestos with the order to continue their travels and tell fellow Ugandans about the LRA's claimed agenda. Most often, however, people destroy these documents out of fear of being labelled rebel collaborators, and even arrested, by the state machinery. Yet in 1997, during fieldwork, I was given one such manifesto. The one-page document promotes, first, the immediate restoration of multiparty politics and, second, the introduction of constitutional federalism. Following these opening statements, it expresses support for human rights, stresses the need to develop nationwide socio-economic balance, and promotes restoration

of nationwide peace and security and an end to corruption. The next items express the need for free and fair elections, the establishment of good relations with neighbouring countries, improvements in the judicial system, and demands that the military organization be separated from the judiciary and executive. Finally, the document argues for the reform of parliament so that it can become capable of tackling 'critical political and economic issues of the country' (Lord's Resistance Army/Movement 1996b).[22] A subsequent and much longer manifesto, given to me by a diaspora contact, also promotes human rights, as well as 'national unity' and the restoration of 'political pluralism' (Lord's Resistance Army/Movement 1997). Again it can be noted that at this point in time, informants felt sceptical about the rebels' claim to support any human rights, because of the many abductions and gross atrocities that they continued to commit.

When I came across the printed political manifesto in late 1999, it was shown to me independently, by different rebel supporters. This undated pamphlet repeats many of the issues put forward in the previous manifestos. But at eighteen pages in length, it also includes more detailed criticism of the practices of Museveni's government. Among other things, Uganda's armed involvement in the Congo is questioned, and multiparty politics are promoted. The pamphlet, which is an obvious continuation of previous manifestos, furthermore acknowledges that structural adjustment programmes are necessary but questions how they were being implemented in Uganda. It argues that people at the grassroots level suffer the most, especially in peripheral areas in the north and the east. The manifesto also includes brief descriptions of the LRA's economic programmes and proposes policies on education, agriculture, health, land and natural resources, infrastructure, commerce and industry, and defence. Finally, the printed pamphlet questions the concentration of the executive, legislative and military powers in Uganda in the hands of a single individual, the president (Lord's Resistance Army/Movement n.d.: 5).

Today the Kampala region is booming and expanding rapidly, and Uganda has been widely regarded, among both academics and influential organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, as a success story of reconstruction, structural adjustment and economic liberalization. Peripheral regions are lagging behind, however; and my informants said that they had benefited only partially from the development, privatization and alleged prosperity of the country. These are of course themes taken up by the rebels, as they try to seek local support and air their political ambitions:

> LRM/A recognize the importance of the World Bank and IMF Structural Adjustment Programs. However, we also recognize that these programs have concentrated on achieving low inflation and deregulating markets to the exclusion of other considerations. The resulting deflationary pressures have undermined prospects for economic recovery, compounding inequalities, undermining the position of women, and failing to protect poor people's access to health and education services. They have contributed to high levels of unemployment and the erosion of social welfare provisions for the poor. Meanwhile market deregulation [has] brought few benefits for those excluded from markets by virtue of their poverty and lack of productive resources. (Lord's Resistance Army/Movement n.d.: 11)

The Ugandan government is said to be 'selling off' the country and its human and natural resources. The rebels are not alone in their critique. Academics Tangri and Mwenda, for example, have shown that the extensive privatization programmes initiated during the 1990s, more often than not infested with corruption, have 'promoted the creation of a tiny wealthy class' rather than following the objectives of 'broadening the basis of ownership' (Tangri and Mwenda 2001: 132f.). Even more vulnerable to such developments, of course, are people who live with bitter war, when little can be done with private means to improve the prospects for the future.

With such developments in mind, it is notable that virtually all LRA manifestos present a critical stance against 'the New World Order' as described by the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman. He does not refer to Uganda in his book; but interestingly, Bauman quotes Zapatista rebels in Chiapas, Mexico, when he tries to put his finger on the frustrations at the so-called peripheries in today's 'process of a world-wide *restratification*', which benefits only very few (Bauman 1998: 70).

What illustrates the new world order is not, perhaps, the weakening of states, as many have suggested, but rather, at least in the Ugandan case, the militarization of the state and its elites in particular (Finnström 2009a). So even if most government officials as well as external observers have dismissed the rebel manifestos as diaspora creations disconnected from Ugandan realities, it must be noted that these documents pinpoint the issues relevant to most people in Acholiland in particular and in Uganda in general. This does give them a certain degree of authenticity. And this, I argue, is a bitter fact of war, just as the gross rebel violence is. In periods of relative calm, the LRA have tried to establish themselves in the political arena, most recently so in the Juba peace talks in South

Sudan. As the LRA peace delegation argues in their opening statement to the talks:

> Your Excellency, it is not true, as has been suggested, that the LRM/A has no political agenda. To say so is to underrate the problem at hand and to give the false impression that LRM/A has no cause for its armed rebellion. Failure to express its Political Agenda loudly [...] does not mean the lack of it. Until now we have been speaking through action. We now want to use this forum, space and time to express our agenda in words. Let the world and all the stakeholders grasp this opportunity to hear us out and be the final judges. (Lord's Resistance Army/Movement 2006)

Without closure: global politics at the peripheries?

On 26 August 2006, the LRA and the Ugandan government signed a cessation of hostilities agreement. This was something that the rebels had long insisted as necessary for serious peace talks. Listening to some of my informants over the phone, and to those who live in the Swedish diaspora, I could hear them voice their scepticism, based on personal experiences and a history of failed talks. They were apprehensive, but I could also sense hope. I especially remember one political refugee living in Sweden, who had suffered tremendously in Museveni's prisons. From our exile in Sweden, we had both done our best to follow the talks in Juba, and when the agreement was signed, he immediately called me. It was a simple fact, he argued with some excitement, that in signing this initial agreement with the LRA, the government had finally, after so many years, recognized the LRA as a political force in Ugandan politics. So too did the outside world, he argued later on, when Jan Egeland, the United Nations undersecretary-general for humanitarian affairs, visited Sudan and met with Joseph Kony in November 2006.

This may be a provocative parallel to end with, but it is essential if we are to better grasp the kind of lived political milieu that has kept the LRA rebels motivated for two decades (see also Branch 2005). It is not surprising that the logic of war alienates people in the war-torn region from the central government. To put it simply, the more violence the rebels have committed against the non-combatant population, the more the government have been blamed by the same exposed people for its failure to protect and provide for its citizens (Doom and Vlassenroot 1999: 28). After the 11 September attacks on the United States in 2001, world politics became more black-and-white than ever. The global war on terror provided the Ugandan government with international support

in its own war on terror, and its unconstitutional counter-insurgency violence increased (Finnström 2009a).

Indeed, the LRA has proved to be one of the most violent rebel groups on the African continent. But as I have tried to show, the story has other aspects to it as well. A growing number of especially young people feel that the war increasingly excludes them from development in Uganda – in other words, that their right to exercise citizenship is denied them. They feel severed from the Ugandan nation and its economic, legal and educational services. To the Ugandan citizenry living in the marginalized north, then, manifestos like those of the LRA may be increasingly attractive.

The manifestos – and the war as such – confirm their experiences of marginality. Here we can recall former US president George W. Bush's stand after the 11 September attacks, 'Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.' This black-and-white rhetoric, with only two possible alternatives, narrowed young people's ability to manoeuvre their way in life, in Uganda also. Social hope has been shrinking, resulting in a radicalization of the position of the rebels, but also of people outside the movement, including its victims. The sensationalist exaggerations of Sam Farmar and many other Western journalists have fuelled this radicalization. 'As citizens we shall not accept injustices to continue,' David, the unmarried teacher also quoted above, told me in 2000. 'If we continue to point out the wrongs and yet there is no change, then we shall look for other options. The present rebellion can be used.'[23] A decade later, there is still no peaceful closure. On the contrary, as I indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the conflict continues to expand geopolitically in Africa and beyond, far beyond the facets covered in this chapter. The LRA is indeed a fluid and changing organization, to use Blattman and Annan's apt description (this volume). After the failed peace talks held on Sudanese territory in 2006 and 2007, and subsequent bombings of rebel encampments in the Congo in December 2008, as well as rebel counter-attacks on mainly Congolese and Sudanese civilians, perhaps anything can happen.

5 Consolata Achelem of Unyama displacement camp was attacked in 2004 by LRA guerrillas while walking alone along a road shortly before sunset. They cut off her lips, ears and nose. In 1994 Kony justified such terror tactics, saying, 'If you lie about us we will cut your lips off, if you run from us we will cut your legs off.' She is seen here with her daughter Aloya in September 2006 (Adam Pletts).