COMPLEX PERPETRATORS:
Forced Marriage, Family, and Fatherhood in the Lord's Resistance Army

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The Lord's Resistance Army and War in Northern Uganda

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has become infamous for the horrific acts of violence it has perpetrated against civilians in the African Great Lakes region, as well as in South Sudan. Between 1986 and 2007, LRA units attacked and looted villages in Uganda, abducting tens of thousands in the process, and contributing to the forced displacement of over one million civilians in the region.[1] Originally formed in Uganda, the rebel group primarily recruited Acholi men and women, an ethnic group based in the north of the country. The Acholi people have historically been marginalized by the Ugandan government and, as such, have accumulated grievances against the state.[2] Perhaps in response to this marginalization, the original stated objective of the LRA was to overthrow the Ugandan government to make way for a

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[1] James Bevan, «The Myth of Madness: Cold Rationality and "Resource" Plunder by the Lord's Resistance Army», *Civil Wars*, 9/4 (2007), pp. 343-358; Sverker Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings: War, History, and Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2008.

[2] Ruddy Doom and Koen Vlassenroot, «Kony's message: a new koine? The Lord's Resistance Army in Northern Uganda», *African affairs*, 98/390 (1999), pp. 5-36.

new, Acholi-led political order. However, over time, the LRA came to terrorize the very Acholi communities it claimed to be fighting for.

Undoubtedly, the emergence of the LRA is multifactorial. Nevertheless, the historical and ongoing disenfranchising of northern Ugandans has been identified as key to understanding the existence and aims of this group. More precisely, the exclusion of northern communities from political and economic power is rooted in Uganda's English colonial rule, but continues to impact the region today.[3] The focus by colonial powers on developing the south, namely its infrastructure, to maximize resource extraction abilities, left northern Uganda at the periphery of economic and political power. This allowed for the accumulation of grievances by northern Ugandans against the state. In addition, the mass recruitment of Acholi men into military forces during this period, largely shaped Acholi-identity, by ascribing the performance of Acholi masculinity in large part to roles of protection and provision, especially soldiering.[4] The mounting frustrations against the government, combined with specific historical events, led to the formation of various rebel groups in the 1980's, including the LRA.

In the 1980's, Uganda experienced a wave of political upheavals marked by a succession of dictatorships and military coups. The mobilization of the LRA is closely associated with these events. More precisely, in 1986, Tito Okello took power by force and assumed the presidency, in the midst of ongoing political turmoil. A northerner, president Okello's Ugandan National Liberation Army (UNLA) was mostly staffed with northerners, and received popular support from Acholi communities. Okello's ascension to the presidency was particularly significant given the long-term exclusion of northerners from state power. However, within the same year, Okello was himself deposed in a coup.[5] As a result of the coup led by Yoweri Museveni, the UNLA fled to the north of the country, fearing retribution. Indeed, Museveni's army pursued the UNLA to the north, significantly impacting civilian security in the process. As a result of this insecurity, a number of armed factions emerged in northern Uganda in the late 1980's, made up of demobilized UNLA soldiers and northerner civilians alike, attempting to defend their lands and air grievances against Museveni's regime.[6] Ultimately, a colonial legacy of militarization and under-development of the north, political instability marked by a succession of coups and

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[3]   Chris Dolan, *Social torture: the case of northern Uganda, 1986-2006*, New York, Berghahn Books, 2009.
[4]   Ruddy Doom and Koen Vlassenroot, «Kony's message», *op. cit.*, pp. 5-36; Frank van Acker, «Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army: The New Order No One Ordered», *African Affairs,* 103/412 (2004), pp. 335-357.
[5]   Ruddy Doom and Koen Vlassenroot, «Kony's message», *op. cit.*, pp. 5-36.
[6]   Frank van Acker, «Uganda and the LRA», *op. cit.*, pp. 335-357.

more direct threats to civilians, triggered the emergence of various armed groups in northern Uganda in the 1980's.

In particular, Alice Auma, led the Holy Spirit Army (HSM), between 1986 and 1987. Considered a mystic by her followers, Alice Auma, or «Lakwena» («the messenger» in Luo) employed a religious doctrine, combining Christian and traditional beliefs. Originally a peaceful group, the HSM gained popularity by appealing to the shared cultural symbols and spiritual beliefs of disenfranchised Acholi people, providing cleansing and healing rituals. Over time, however, the HSM's goal shifted towards armed struggle, in response to attacks by Museveni's National Resistance Army (NRA). In recruiting members to engage in armed struggle, Lakwena then claimed that spiritually pure, ritualistically cleansed HSM members, would be made impervious to bullets and other attacks. Following a surprising number of successful attacks against the NRA, the HSM dissolved in 1987, after a failed attack on Kampala (the seat of government). The doctrinal foundations laid by Alice Lakwena, combined with the dissolution of the HSM, allowed for Joseph Kony, a rumored cousin of Alice Auma, to recruit demobilized HSM and UNLA members into what would become the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).[7]

Often described as a cult personality, Joseph Kony, similar to Alice Auma, is seen as a «Lakwena» and mystic, who communicates directly with spirits and shares these messages with members of the rebel group. The LRA's religious doctrine closely resembles the HSM's. However, while maintaining similar rules, such as a strict adherence to the Christian «10 commandments», the LRA's doctrine quickly became the basis for ordering acts of brutality against «impure» civilian Acholi. Any civilians who did not fully support the LRA were positioned as «traitors» to the cause (of building a spiritually pure, «new Acholi» nation). Through this rhetoric, civilian Acholis became «the enemy» in need of cleansing, and proxy for oppressive government forces. As such, the LRA waged war in the Acholi districts of Uganda, maiming civilians suspected of collaborating with the government's armed forces.[8] Joseph Kony communicated the spirits' messages to the LRA members, expecting obedience for all orders, including orders to abduct young boys and girls from surrounding communities.

In addition to the brutal acts committed by the LRA against civilians, extreme coercion and violence were also rampant within the armed group. Composed largely of abducted youth, LRA commanders

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[7]   Erin Baines, «Forced Marriage as a Political Project: Sexual Rules and Relations in the Lord's Resistance Army», *Journal of Peace Research*, 51/3 (2014), pp. 405-417.

[8]   Chris Dolan, *Social Torture*, *op. cit.*; Ruddy Doom and Koen Vlassenroot, «Kony's message», *op. cit.*, pp. 5-36.

exercised near absolute control over the group's membership, through a military ranking system, with Joseph Kony as supreme leader. This ranking system facilitated the administration of rewards but also brutal punishments, including beatings, torture, and killings for contravening any of Kony's orders. Further legitimizing these practices, the LRA implemented religious rituals, and strict regulations for LRA members. This included rigid control over sexuality and gendered relations. Anyone caught resisting and contravening established rules, attempting to escape, or simply engaging in unsanctioned relationships were thus harshly punished, or even killed.[9]

The LRA is no longer active in northern Uganda, and was forced to retreat due to various peace talks and military operations, which have significantly deflated its numbers. However, at the time of writing, the LRA remains active in South Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Central African Republic.[10]

Forced marriage in the LRA

In their battle against the Government of Uganda, the LRA abducted between 60,000 and 80,000 children into armed conflict.[11] Children were preferred for several reasons: it was thought that they would not know the area well enough to escape, they would be easier to indoctrinate than adults, and that it was an efficient tactic to terrorize families and communities.[12] While all children were potential targets, the abduction, forced marriage, and forced impregnation of women and girls featured prominently in the LRA's modus operandi.[13] Women and girls taken by the LRA were involved in multiple roles and tasks as porters, combatants, and cooks.[14] Moreover, as a critical part of his military and ideological operations, Joseph Kony organized and implemented a forced wife system.[15] Girls –with a preference for tho-

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[9] Chris Dolan, *Social Torture, op. cit.*

[10] Omer Aijazi and Erin Baines, «Relationality, Culpability and Consent in Wartime: Men's Experiences of Forced Marriage», *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 11/3 (2017), pp. 463-483.

[11] Fiona Shanahan and Angela Veale, «How mothers mediate the social integration of their children conceived of forced marriage within the Lord's Resistance Army», *Child abuse & neglect*, 51 (2016), pp. 72-86.

[12] Myriam Denov and Atim Angela Lakor, «Post-War Stigma, Violence and "Kony Children": The Responsibility to Protect Children Born in Lord's Resistance Army Captivity in Northern Uganda», *Global Responsibility to Protect*, 10/1-2 (2018), pp. 217-238.

[13] *Ibidem*, pp. 217-238.

[14] Angela Veale, Susan McKay, Miranda Worthen, and Michael G. Wessells, «Participation as principle and tool in social reintegration: Young mothers formerly associated with armed groups in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Northern Uganda», *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 22/8 (2013), pp. 829-848.

[15] Khristopher Carlson and Dyan Mazurana, *Forced Marriage within the Lord's Resistance Army, Uganda*, Somerville, Feinstein International Center, 2008.

se aged 12-13– were captured and given to commander «husbands».[16] The «wives» became the exclusive property of the commanders: these girls were required to obey any and every command and to never refuse their «husbands» sexual services. It is generally reported that high ranking members of the LRA would determine when men and women were ready to be «married».[17] While research has shown that most women had little choice in the matter,[18] men's experiences with the process appears more varied. Men perpetrated brutal acts of violence, including forced marriage, and sexual violence.[19] However, some men were also forced to accept the wives assigned to them, whereas some may have had a choice in the matter,[20] highlighting the complexity of their realities and experiences within the LRA. The use of sexual violence or forced marriage as a strategy of war is in no way unique to the northern Ugandan context. Traced back to the eleventh century and continuing through the most recent wars, conflict-related sexual violence has been documented during World Wars I and II, the Vietnam War, and the conflicts in northern Uganda, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Timor Leste, Colombia, and Rwanda, to name a few.[21] Nevertheless, there is limited inquiry into the experiences of men within armed groups as it relates to these forms of violence.

Portrayals of Men Formerly in the LRA: Dichotomous Narratives and Invisibility

For the most part, research on the LRA has explored its historical foundations and political aims,[22] the experiences of children abducted and made to participate in armed conflict,[23] the perspectives of

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[16] Myriam Denov and Atim Angela Lakor, «The Responsibility to Protect», *op. cit.*, pp. 217-238.

[17] Omer Aijazi and Erin Baines, «Relationality, Culpability and Consent in Wartime», *op. cit.*, pp. 463-483.

[18] Myriam Denov, Amber Green, Atim Angela Lakor, and Janet Arach, «Mothering in the Aftermath of Forced Marriage and Wartime Rape: The Complexities of Motherhood in Postwar Northern Uganda», *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement*, 9/1 (2018), pp. 158-176.

[19] Omer Aijazi and Erin Baines, «Relationality, Culpability and Consent in Wartime», *op. cit.*, pp. 463-483

[20] *Ibidem*, pp. 463-483.

[21] Myriam Denov, «Children born of wartime rape: The intergenerational complexities of sexual violence and abuse», *Ethics, Medicine and Public Health*, 11 (2015), pp. 61-68

[22] James Bevan, «The Myth of Madness», *op. cit.*, pp. 343-358; Ruddy Doom and Koen Vlassenroot, «Kony's message», *op. cit.*, pp. 5-36; Frank van Acker, «Uganda and the LRA», *op. cit.*, pp. 335-357; Chris Dolan, *Social Torture*, *op. cit.*; Phuong N. Pham, Patrick Vinck, and Eric Stover, «The Lord's Resistance Army and forced conscription in northern Uganda», *Human Rights Quarterly*, 30/404 (2008).

[23] Sofie Vindevogel et al., «Forced conscription of children during armed conflict: Experiences of former child soldiers in northern Uganda», *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 35/7 (2011), pp. 551-562; Angela Veale and Aki Stavrou: «Violence, reconciliation and iden-

women who were forcibly married in the LRA,[24] and implications for post-conflict reconstruction.[25] More recently, the International Criminal Court's indictment of Dominic Ongwen, a top commander of the LRA, has sparked important conversations on the legal system's adequacy in holding accountable those abducted into armed groups, who are now accused of orchestrating war crimes and crimes against humanity.[26] However, very little has been written on the experiences of boys who were abducted into the LRA and grew up within the ranks, alongside their views on forced marriage. Aijazi and Baines contend that «rights-based approaches to forced marriage in wartime, document forms of harm women experience to the exclusion of men's experiences».[27] These authors highlight how the dearth of literature on men's experiences has tended to foster a largely dichotomous narrative of LRA women and girls as «passive victims» and LRA men and boys as «agentive perpetrators». Yet the aggregation of literature on men and women who were abducted, indoctrinated and forced to participate in the LRA, suggests a more complex dynamic. In addition to their experiences of forced marriage, women and girls took part in hostilities, and were involved in acts of brutality against other LRA members and civilians, often for survival and self-preservation.[28] Yet research has also suggested that men who have exited the LRA often identify coercion and torture as the basis for their

tity: The reintegration of Lord's Resistance Army child abductees in Northern Uganda», *Institute for Security Studies Monographs*, 2003/92 (2003), p. 69; Peter Eichstaedt, *First kill your family: Child soldiers of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army*, Chicago, Chicago Review Press, 2009.

[24] Myriam Denov, Amber Green, Atim Angela Lakor, Janet Arach, «Mothering in the Aftermath of Force Marriage and Wartime Rape: The Complexities of Motherhood in Post-war northern Uganda», *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative,* 9/1 (2018), pp. 156-174; Erin Baines, *Buried in the heart: Women, complex victimhood and the war in northern Uganda*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017; Jeannie Annan, Moriah Brier, and Filder Aryemo, «From "rebel" to "returnee" daily life and reintegration for young soldiers in Northern Uganda», *Journal of adolescent research,* 24/6 (2009), pp. 639-667.

[25] Ilse Derluyn, Eric Broekaert, Gilberte Schuyten, and Els De Temmerman, «Post-traumatic stress in former Ugandan child soldiers», *The Lancet*, 363/9412 (2004), pp. 861-863; Jeannie Annan, Christopher Blattman, Dyan Mazurana, and Khristopher Carlson, «Civil war, reintegration, and gender in Northern Uganda», *Journal of conflict resolution*, 55/6 (2011), pp. 877-908.

[26] Erin K. Baines, «Complex political perpetrators: reflections on Dominic Ongwen», *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 47/2 (2009), pp. 163-191; Adam Branch, «Dominic Ongwen on Trial: The ICC's African Dilemmas», *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 11/1 (2016), pp. 30-49; Mark Drumbl, «Victims Who Victimize: Transcending International Criminal Law's Binaries», *Washington and Lee Legal Studies Paper*, 2016/2 (2016).

[27] Omer Aijazi and Erin Baines, «Relationality, Culpability and Consent in Wartime», *op. cit.*, pp. 463-483, for the quotation p. 463.

[28] *Ibidem*; Jeannie Annan, Moriah Brier, and Filder Aryemo, «From "rebel" to "returnee"», *op. cit.*; Erin K. Baines, «Complex political perpetrators», *op. cit.*; Sophie Kramer, «Forced marriage and the absence of gang rape: Explaining sexual violence by the Lord's

actions within the armed group.[29] As Drumbl poignantly captures, men who had been abducted by the LRA, often as children, could rise through the ranks, and come to orchestrate abductions, pillaging and forced marriage –the very forms of violence they themselves had been subjected to, and continued to be victims of–.[30]

To better understand the experiences of men in the LRA, this paper draws on interviews with 20 men formerly abducted into the LRA who rose within the ranks, and fathered children conceived within forced marriages. Following a discussion of the methodology, the paper explores former male LRA members' perspectives on forced marriage, family, and fatherhood within the LRA. We highlight the ways in which the complexity of participants' position as captives, but also high-ranking members of the LRA, is central in understanding their agency as fathers, husbands, victims and perpetrators. We conclude with a discussion on the dangers of the single script or story regarding acts of violence, illustrating how participants reported being abductees, forced husbands, self-identified as caring fathers, but had also perpetrated acts of violence. We emphasize how all these stories can be simultaneously true. Indeed, exploring men's realities within the LRA, particularly with regards to forced marriage and fatherhood can help to unravel and gain a deeper grasp of the complexity of war. An overarching goal is to multiply and «complexify» the accounts available on forced marriage. Our intention is in no way to diminish the immense suffering of women and girls who were subjected to forced marriage.[31] Instead, we hope to draw attention to the complexity of men's experiences in relation to forced marriage, highlighting their realities as perpetrators, victims, fathers, and husbands.

Methodology

Funded by the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation, this research was a collaboration of the authors, who are researchers at McGill University and *Watye Ki Gen* («We Have Hope»), a local community-based organization of women formerly abducted into the LRA, based in Gulu, Uganda. *Watye Ki Gen* works for the rights and the welfare of children

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Resistance Army in Northern Uganda», *The Journal of Politics and Society*, 23/1 (2012), *op. cit.*, pp. 11-49.

[29]   Chris Dolan, «Victims who are Men», in F. Ni Aolain, N. Cahn, D.F. Haynes, N. Valji (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Gender and Conflict*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017; Mark Drumbl, «Victims Who Victimize», *op. cit.*; Angela Veale and Aki Stavrou, «Violence, reconciliation and identity», *op. cit.*, p. 69.

[30]   Chris Dolan, «Victims who are Men»; *op. cit.*; Mark Drumbl, «Victims Who Victimize», *op. cit.*; Angela Veale and Aki Stavrou, «Violence, reconciliation and identity», *op. cit.*, p. 69.

[31]   See Myriam Denov et al., «Mothering in the Aftermath of Forced Marriage», *op. cit.*, pp. 158-176.

born in LRA captivity. This study received ethical approval from two research ethics boards: the first from the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology/Office of the President, and the second from the Research Ethics Board of McGill University, Canada.

Data collection with a total of 20 males who were formerly in the LRA occurred between January 2017 and June 2018. Participants were identified and approached by research partners at *Watye Ki Gen*. Given their former LRA affiliation, researchers at *Watye Ki Gen* hold in-depth knowledge of the LRA's history, membership, wartime activities, and areas of operation. This enabled the research team to access potential participants and also verify their affiliation to the LRA. Participants were included in the study if they were male, had been formerly affiliated with the LRA, and fathered children who were born in captivity. Informed consent was attained from all participants.

In-depth interviews were conducted with former male LRA commanders who, at the time of interview, were aged between 29 and 67 years. These men were abducted by the LRA between the ages of 10 and 38 and spent between 6 and 24 years in captivity. During their time in the LRA, these men fathered between 1 and 11 children. Data were collected in the northern Ugandan districts of Gulu, Pader, Agago, Omoro, and Nwoya, representing both urban and rural contexts. Interviews explored men's perspectives on sexual violence, forced marriage, fatherhood, the LRA command structure, children born in captivity, and post-war reintegration. Interviews were conducted in Acholi and audio-recorded with permission. All data was translated and transcribed into English.

The data collected from the participants was invariably affected by their willingness to disclose sensitive information. The potential flaws of memory and self-disclosure should be taken into account when considering participants' narratives. Moreover, as a result of the small sample size, the study cannot be generalized to the realities and experiences of the broader population of former LRA members.

Data was analyzed using an iterative process involving the continual analysis of qualitative data. Transcribed interviews were studied at length and prominent and recurring themes in the data were identified and coded using N-Vivo qualitative software. This process enabled significant themes and patterns to emerge –particularly with regard to participants' views of forced marriage, and fatherhood within the LRA–. To facilitate analysis, a conceptual coding tree was created, allowing patterns and the relationship between themes to be visually mapped. The following section outlines the realities of forced

marriage in the LRA, and participant's perspectives on the use of forced marriage.

Men's Perspectives on the Use of Forced Marriage

Within the LRA, forced marriage has been described as a strategy towards ensuring abductee compliance to the armed group and to prevent escape.[32] Research on the experiences and perspectives of girls and women who experienced forced marriage has highlighted the widespread reality of sexual violence and subjugation by LRA «husbands». This was alongside a strict hierarchy amongst wives that further entrenched them into a violent hierarchical system of control within the LRA.[33] Yet, how, in the post-war period, did males formerly in the LRA understand and explain the use of forced marriage? Why, in their view, was forced marriage initiated and propagated by the LRA? What purpose did it serve? Participants in our sample reported that «marriage» in the LRA was deliberately and systematically implemented and organized from high command. According to our participants, forced marriage served several key functions: 1) to prevent civilian rape, 2) to prevent abductees from escaping, and 3) to create familial bonds and cohesion within the LRA through marriage and children. In addressing these three inter-related functions, we highlight the ways in which forced marriage was key to ensuring compliance and the overall functioning of the LRA.

Forced Marriage as «Preventing Civilian Rape»

Several scholars who have studied the structure of the LRA, have claimed that the rape of civilians was forbidden.[34] Supporting this supposition, our participants declared that the rape of civilians was strictly forbidden within the LRA –an act punishable by severe beatings or even death–. These participants noted:

> The LRA had strict rules against committing an act such as rape [against civilians]. The culprits would be punished harshly, including even executing them in a firing squad (Participant 10).
> The LRA has strict rules against having forced sex […] The punishment for anyone in the LRA found to have raped a civilian was so severe. I can recall

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[32] Erin Baines, «Forced Marriage as a Political Project», *op. cit.*, pp. 405-417; Sophie Kramer, «Forced marriage and the absence of gang rape», *op. cit.*, pp. 11-49.

[33] Myriam Denov and Atim Angela Lakor, «When war is better than peace: The post-conflict realities of children born of wartime rape in northern Uganda», *Child abuse & neglect*, 65 (2017), pp. 255-265; Myriam Denov and Atim Angela Lakor, «The Responsibility to Protect», *op. cit.*, pp. 217-238.

[34] For example, see Erin Baines, «Forced Marriage as a Political Project», *op. cit.*, pp. 405-417; Sophie Kramer, «Forced marriage and the absence of gang rape», *op. cit.*, pp. 11-49.

one of the commanders […] he would put the girls in one place and he would begin raping them. [Kony] handed [the commander] over to the civilian population saying: «the LRA does not support rape». [Kony] went on to say: «We are fighting for you. We are God's people and so we do not encourage such bad acts». The civilians ended up beating [the commander] to death. His friend, who was his bodyguard, but was not involved in raping girls, was given 100 strokes of the cane. I personally witnessed this incident (Participant 3).

Given the reported prohibition of civilian rape, an order that apparently came from top command, participants asserted that the creation of LRA «marriages» was used as a deliberate strategy to prevent the rape of civilians:

[Why were marriages created in the LRA?] Having wives/women in the LRA would prevent the LRA from misconduct of raping the civilians when they were out on operations (Participant 12).

In addition to «preventing civilian rape», the following participants claimed that marriage served other related purposes. This included the prevention of the spread of AIDS, ensuring more «harmonious» relations among men in the LRA, and to discourage rape within the LRA itself:

[Why did the LRA want people to get «married»? What purpose did it serve?] A married woman would not be rivaled over, thus creating a «friendlier» atmosphere to men be it in military, other institution or any other group in the art of life. A free unmarried lady in a group of men would be [like a] play thing or prostituting. Prostitutes not only create a hate trade amongst men, but also spread sexually transmitted diseases [like] AIDS. The LRA did not want such situations (Participant 7).
The idea is to give you a wife who will preoccupy your mind and prevent you from making sexual advances on other people's wives […] to discourage rape. Some people –especially those without wives– are always abducting girls. For fear of raping those girls, they are given wives (Participant 14).

Forced Marriage to Prevent Escape

As noted in the methodology, all our participants reported that they had been abducted by the LRA between the ages of 10 and 38 and spent between 6 and 24 years in captivity. Participants vividly recalled the experience surrounding their abduction. As this participant recounted:

I stayed in the bush for many years and during my time in the bush, I witnessed a lot. First of all, when I was newly abducted, I was told that if I dared to escape, I would be killed. I witnessed a scenario where some people who were caught escaping were brought before everyone and the newly abducted children were made to kill those who had been caught escaping. This incident created a lot of fear in us who were newly abducted about ever thinking of escaping (Participant 20).

Within the LRA, escape was reported to be a major preoccupation by those in high command. A multitude of strategies were devised, including the threat of death, to prevent abductees from escaping. Participants discussed the ways in which «marriage» was strategically created to assure compliance within the LRA. They reported that the creation of «marriages» was meant to encourage allegiance to the LRA, while simultaneously preventing escape:

The high-ranking commanders created marriages in the LRA to preoccupy the minds of the commanders so that they would not develop ideas of escaping. Marriage was also created to remove a situation where one is always worrying and thinking about home (Participant 13).
[Why did the LRA want people to be «married»? What purpose did it serve?] First of all, people stayed in the LRA for a long time. This is partly because they had wives and children. It became hard for a man with wives and children to think of escaping back home (Participant 14).
It was hard to escape with all your family members without being caught. I think that is one aspect that Kony looked into, to allow marriage in LRA. For example, I kept rejecting the girls given to me up to an extent where I was being accused as having a plan to escape from the LRA. Kony was wise to think of allowing marriage in the LRA. I had this thought that in case I got a wife and then she got a chance of escaping from the LRA leaving me behind, I would not find her still waiting for me [once I returned from the bush]. Or if I escaped and left her behind, she would blame me for having abandoned her in the bush. That was partly the reason as to why I kept rejecting the girls given to me. It reached a point where I accepted a girl I was given for a wife. And indeed, what I had thought earlier came to pass. My wife escaped before me, and gave birth from home (Participant 14).

The Creation of Families, Lakwena's Prophecy, and Children Born in LRA Captivity

In addition to preventing escape, forced marriage appeared to serve other purposes. According to participants, the creation of marriages

within the armed group also sought to increase the ties and bonds linking abductees to the LRA:

> I saw this idea of allowing «marriage» in the LRA as a way Joseph Kony could tie people to the LRA (Participant 14).

While evidence has indicated that marriages in the LRA were forced, our participants nonetheless conceptualized their «marriages» as important unions, and ultimately, as «family». These participants noted:

> Yes, I considered us a family. But given the circumstances that we were in, we did not know what the next day would hold for us (Participant 17).
> God only gives you a gift of a family once. To me the gift of family was God-given. My family is my beginning and my end. I strived hard to ensure that I took good care of my [LRA] family (Participant 4).
> I considered myself a family in the bush because, first of all, my wife and I had a mutual understanding to enter the relationship which she consented to. Also, the fact that we had children between us gave me a lot of confidence that we were a family (Participant 18).

LRA «marriages» then, served to create a sense of belonging, and according to the following participant, to make male members of the LRA «happy», «forget their worries» and for their «wives» to provide for the domestic needs of their «husbands»:

> [Why was it important for the LRA to abduct young girls?] First of all, it is God's will that a man should be with a wife. When I am at home I am able to marry a wife. So why not –when I am an adult and in the bush– to also be able to have a wife? All this was looked into, and eventually marriage was allowed in the LRA. Also, women played many important roles in the bush. First and foremost, a woman makes a man happy and they help men forget their worries. My wife would prepare food for me, prepare water for bathing, and she would also provide me with company (Participant 20).

Alongside marriage, the birth of children served to further solidify these «familial» bonds. As noted by Denov and Lakor,[35] the forced wife system had among its objectives to produce a new clan and the next generation of LRA fighters. The birth of children was explained by participants as linked both to the spiritual prophecy of Kony, as well

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[35] Myriam Denov and Atim Angela Lakor, «When war is better than peace», *op. cit.*, pp. 255-265; Myriam Denov and Atim Angela Lakor, «The Responsibility to Protect», *op. cit.*, pp. 217-238.

as a way to keep boost the morale within the LRA through the birth of children:

> It was prophesized by «Lakwena» [Kony] that there would come a time when the LRA would have children. So, there was no way that the prophecy made by Lakwena [Kony] would have to come to pass without women to give birth to those children (Participant 12).

> I think Kony was trying to increase morale and to make people happy. He knew that people loved children and so by making such comments about giving birth to children, it would make them feel good (Participant 4).
> Having children in the bush is inappropriate. But according to the order from above: «We will overthrow the government with all our children and return home with all of them» was the statement from Joseph Kony. It was also feared that when children were freed, they would be poisoned. So, it was a decision made by Kony that everyone should keep their children. It was never easy to stay with children in the bush because some of them would sustain injuries and experience […] harsh conditions (Participant 3).

Importantly, participants asserted that within the LRA, any child born in captivity belonged to the LRA first and foremost, rather than to their mothers or fathers:

> Joseph Kony used to say that our children belonged to the LRA and that they are not our children (Participant 18).

«We Were Both Trapped»: Marriage as Limited Choice

Given that participants and their «wives» were abducted and compelled to obey the norms and rules of the LRA, participants often viewed their marriage as a union that they could not refuse. In a situation where they felt they had limited or no choice, participants spoke of «being trapped», having «no option» but to «take on» a wife. Under such circumstances, participants sought to «make the best» of a difficult situation. Within the powerful structural constraints and culture of violence that embodied the LRA, participants spoke of the ways in which, over time, their marriage became a relationship that offered them protection, support, and comfort:

> The relationship had not been a good one at the initial stage but since we were both trapped up in the same environment and had the same experience, something positive or fairly positive had to come out of it. We later

became like a brother and sister to support, protect, and comfort each other (Participant 7).
I told you earlier that when girls were abducted and taken to the LRA camps, they were gathered in one place. For example, a girl is brought forward and was told: «From now on, this is your husband; have you heard?». «I have heard», the girl would reply. So, it was the same thing that happened to me. I was given my wife in a similar manner. We would then begin staying together knowing what to expect of each other (Participant 7).

It was wrong. Had it not been for strict [LRA] rules to follow, I feel all men should have refused [wives]. For me, I couldn't refuse for the second time because I was already weak with gunshot wounds, and they insisted she cook for me. She was at the boss' place because her husband was shot dead, but they properly convinced me the same way the devil deceives. I had no option. I accepted to have her. […] I engaged her into an agreement so that I would not force her [for sex] against her will. I had very little interest in her but I refused to give any room for my boss to have suspicion of me doing anything against them. The woman then told me she had no problem with the idea. We were both abducted and the only thing we should keep in our minds, is living… Then I saw sense in her and we started staying together and God blessed us with a girl (Participant 19).

Marriage and Rape: Participants' Perspectives on Sexual Violence Within the LRA

Within our study, many male participants emphasized the absence of sexual violence within the LRA, denied their direct involvement in committing sexual violence, or avoided the question altogether. Below, we highlight participants' perspectives on sexual violence within the armed group.

Participants described at length the rules prohibiting rape within the LRA, as a way of emphasizing its condemnation. In the passage below, a strict distinction was being drawn between rape and forced marriage, implying that ritualistic practices which sanctioned these marriages, legitimized them, and thus represented something altogether different from sexual violence:

[Did you ever see other members of the LRA forcing women to have sex?] When I was abducted by the LRA, one thing I witnessed was that Joseph Kony did not allow his commanders to have sex with abducted girls before they were brought before him. Joseph Kony would first of all ensure that those abducted girls were smeared with shea nut oil and a white powder

called camoplast as a way of blessing them. But those who would rape girls/women were those who would have broken the rules. Such people caught raping would be punished harshly. Otherwise Kony wanted all abducted girls blessed through smearing them with sheer nut oil and camoplast before they are given to the men (Participant 13).

Others denied the occurrence of sexual violence in the LRA altogether:

[Within the LRA] I did not see any members of the LRA forcing women to have sex, nor did I witness any members of the LRA forcing women to have sex (Participant 17).

On the other hand, some participants indirectly acknowledged the occurrence of sexual violence within the LRA. However, all of participants asserted that *they* had not sexually assaulted their wives or other women and girls in the LRA. Moreover, all but one participant emphasized that the wife or wives «assigned» to them had been «of age» to marry:

Forced sex usually came about when a girl was given to a household of a commander to help out and later/after some time, she was retained in that house hold to serve as a wife. This did not happen in my case (Participant 11).
I heard of some men in the LRA forcing women into having sex with them. Personally, I did not force my wife to have sex. I remember when she was given to me; I spent up to three days without coming into contact with her sexually. I spent three days finding out how she was leading her life. I also asked her whether she feared me, and whether she did not want to become my wife. I asked her: «Do you want to be my wife?» She answered: «Yes». Then told her that from today onwards, you are now my wife (Participant 8).
[Did you ever force your wife to have sex with you?] I believe that when you are staying together as husband and wife in a house, there is nothing like forced sex; the desire to have sex may not come to the woman and man at the same time. You may find a situation where it is the man who feels like having sex and so if I make a sexual advance and you do not mention to me that you are not in the mood of having sex, and you go ahead and submit to me, would that be referred to as rape? (Participant 18)

Fatherhood within the LRA

The notion of fatherhood within the LRA has garnered little attention. Our interviews thus sought to explore how participants viewed fatherhood and their children born in LRA captivity. According to

participants, children represented innocence and hope for the future. In addition, children born in captivity provided them with a sense of belonging, further underscoring the effectiveness of forced marriage in bonding abductees to the LRA. Fathers also viewed their progeny as «gifts from God», implying the sacredness of their children, and, by extension, their role as fathers:

> Children are naturally important to everyone. A child does not have a mentality of a rebel. It is the child's father who is the rebel. A child being a citizen of Uganda is also an important thing. They are the hope of the future (Participant 8).
>
> I was happy and thankful to God for my child. Just like a rat survives where there are cats, just like other animals live and survive among their prey, and so I asked God to protect my child and also to give us wisdom to survive in the bush. God has actually protected us, and we are still alive to-date (Participant 4).

Fatherhood in the Bush: Struggling to Provide and Protect

Despite the sense of hope and purpose that children provided, fatherhood in the bush was reported as particularly difficult, due in part to resource scarcity. As such, ensuring the welfare of their children was reported as a significant challenge for participants. These men described their struggles to acquire essential goods, through any means necessary (often looting) to provide for their family. Fathers reported caring for their children the best way they knew how to, despite extremely challenging circumstances. On the other hand, this care and concern was also reported by participants as a source of heartache, especially when children died in the bush. Most reported that their profound attachment to their children, combined with an awareness that raising a child in captivity was close to impossible, often led them to «free» their progeny over time, allowing them to escape the LRA with their mothers:

> I looked at the hard conditions the children were living in and when the time came, I began freeing my wife and children to return home. Like I mentioned earlier, life was a bit easier when we were in Sudan. But when we returned to Uganda, two of my wives were already with children. So, I began freeing my wives who had children to go home. [Did you free them because you were worried about the children?]. Yes! It became hard also to carry children who were not yet able to walk (Participant 10).

Participants also described their efforts to protect and provide for their children:

> We used to stay together; we would ensure that they had something to eat. For those children that were unable to walk, we would carry them, we would find for them what to wear. There is not much difference from how we care for their welfare here at home. Also, if there was fighting, we would evacuate them from danger to safety (Participant 5).
> I would ensure that where he would be laid to sleep was arranged well such that he would not catch any cold. I would also protect them, especially when crossing a river to the other side; I would ensure that they crossed ahead of me. I always made sure I was within their sight (Participant 3).

Participants reported feeling devastated when they lost their children, many of whom died in the bush. They described the depth of their sorrow as linked to the particularly strong father-child bond forged through adversity in an active war zone:

> In total, I lost six kids; one boy and five girls born in captivity. They were so dear to me. I still have the memories of how I soothed them. No, it was too much! I named all my children by the names of my family members I was forced to leave back home. I saw my children as the continuation of the family that I was forced to leave. At the moment, I have more than two innocent souls. A father is a father no matter what circumstances but one that no child ever called his/her father anything else other than a father in the LRA. Children in captivity got closer to their fathers. In harsh situations, fathers took full responsibilities to protect, feed, treat and comfort children. They then grew up with the knowledge that a father means everything (Participant 7).

Ongoing Care and Concern for Children

Expressions of fatherly concerns were not reserved to participants' time in the bush. Even though most had lost contact with their children after exiting the LRA, participants continued to worry about the welfare of their children:

> I do not have contact with all of my children who were born in captivity. There are those […] let me call them maternal parents, who are blocking us, fathers of children who were born in captivity, from having contact with our children. I do not have access to two of my children much as my wish is to have contact with them. I need to have a relationship with my children for them to know me as their father. I just hear rumors that one of them is in se-

nior four (S.4) while the other one is in senior three (S.3). [Do you think that your children think about you?] Yes, they think about me so much. There was a time when those two children of mine forced their maternal family to allow them to come and see their sister at my home. That was the last time I saw them (Participant 1).

[Did you follow your bush wife to her new home after the war?] No, I did not. My bush wife was called by her brother and she came along with her new husband. We then sat down in a meeting. This is what I had to tell them: «I have come specifically to have my children back, so that I can go back with them and I see how I can put them in school». They told me that they do not object to my request, because indeed those children are mine. But they read out a list of what I should fulfill in order to have my children back. When I returned home, I found it hard to raise that money and that is why I have not yet returned to them (Participant 16).

[Do you have a future plan for your children? Would you want your children to receive inheritance from you?] That is why I am struggling to carry out farming; it is because I want their future to be bright through education (Participant 18).

My desire for my child is to see to it that he studies so that he can have a better future. I think it will also be an opportunity for him to tell some history about us when we are out of this world. My child is so important to me (Participant 2).

Discussion. Beyond a Single Story: Men in the LRA

As discussed in the introduction, there is a dearth of literature on ex-LRA men's experiences with forced marriage and sexual violence. Existing literature has, for the most part, focused on the experiences of women as forced wives.[36] Other literature addresses young boys and men recently abducted into the LRA as victims, and as child soldiers.[37] Yet our interviews reveal that men who had become adults and husbands in the LRA held multiple identities. In the present study, partici-

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[36] Khristopher Carlson and Dyan Mazurana, *Forced Marriage*, *op. cit.;* Moses Chrispus Okello and Lucy Hovil, «Confronting the reality of gender-based violence in Northern Uganda», *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 1/3 (2007), pp. 433-443; Eugene Kinyanda et al., «War related sexual violence and its medical and psychological consequences as seen in Kitgum, Northern Uganda: A cross-sectional study», *BMC International Health and Human Rights,* 10/1 (2010).

[37] Sofie Vindevogel et al., «Forced conscription of children during armed conflict», *op. cit.*, pp. 551-562; Angela Veale and Aki Stavrou, «Former Lord's Resistance Army child soldier abductees: Explorations of identity in reintegration and reconciliation», *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 13/3 (2007), pp. 273-292; Grace Akello, Annemiek Richters, and Ria Reis, «Reintegration of former child soldiers in northern Uganda: coming to terms with children's agency and accountability», *Intervention*, 4/3 (2006), pp. 229-243.

pants rose through the ranks within the rebel group, many becoming commanders. At the same time, some of these LRA members reported that they had been themselves forced to marry and were conflicted about the LRA's practice of coerced unions. Perhaps understating their role in engaging in sexual violence and forced marriage, participants nonetheless remain multifaceted individuals. They had been abducted and indoctrinated into Kony's army, but they had also often taken on more active roles over time (such as enforcing the kidnapping of other youths, and enacting forced marriage). In addition, many participants identified as part of a «family» in the bush, expressing concern for their children, who they reportedly strove to protect and provide for. Baines[38] has described mothers and forced wives in the LRA as «complex victims», forced to marry and bare children but also as taking part in acts of cruelty, often as a means of self-preservation. In a similar vein, male LRA abductees, fathers and husbands in the LRA, might be viewed as «complex» or «tragic» perpetrators[39] transcending a «single story» of adult men in the LRA.

In *The Danger of a Single Story* Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie spoke of the importance of telling complex or multiple stories, illustrating how, when a «single story» of «Africans» (or any group of individuals) is provided, this single story becomes «the only story», thus narrowing our understanding of, and relationship to, members of this group, or even ourselves. She explains:

> I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: it robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar.[40]

Echoing this reflection, Martins[41] detailed the danger of single stories in relation to child soldiers. She describes how the iconography of child soldiers –mainly through cinema and literature– depicts child soldiers as «innocent victims exposed to brutality». This depiction impacts not only global perceptions of these young people, but also contributes to removing their agency. A monolithic public discourse may

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[38]   Erin Baines, *Buried in the heart, op. cit.*
[39]   Mark Drumbl, «Victims Who Victimize», *op. cit.*; Mark Drumbl, «Tragic Perpetrators and Imperfect Victims», *Asser Today*, (2017), <http://www.asser.nl/about-the-institute/asser-today/tragic-perpetrators-and-imperfect-victims> [last time accessed 12/11/2018].
[40]   N. Adichie Chimamanda, «The Danger of a Single Story» *TedGlobal,* 13:41-14:04 (July 2009) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs241zeg> [last time accessed 14/12/2018].
[41]   Catarina Martins, «The dangers of the single story: Child-soldiers in literary fiction and film», *Childhood*, 18/4 (2011), pp. 434-446.

silence the complexity of their experiences as victims, perpetrators, and witnesses of violence, simultaneously.[42] There is a large body of literature addressing child soldiers[43] as well as the specific experiences of children who were abducted into the LRA.[44] However, less has been written about what happens when these young people grow up within an armed group, as was the case for our research participants.

Given the documented atrocities committed by men in the LRA,[45] as well as the first-hand narratives of women and girls who were brutally victimized –physically, emotionally, and sexually– during their time in the LRA,[46] there may be a natural impulse to present a single story of men within the LRA solely as perpetrators of violence. And while men were undoubtedly perpetrators of violence, our interviews reveal a more complex picture. This includes descriptions by participants of their multiple roles as self-identified fathers, caregivers, and in some cases, victims of violence, and forced marriage.

Being a «good father» in the bush appeared to be a key aspect of participants' narratives. While some participants reported feeling conflicted about their bush «marriage», their love for their child(ren) born in captivity was reportedly unwavering. The importance they placed on their role as fathers underscores the effectiveness of forced marriage in increasing bonds, and creating «families» in LRA captivity. At times, the commitment of fathers to their children contributed to their decision to remain in the LRA despite their desire to escape. Caring for their children also appeared to provide these participants with a purpose, beyond the hopelessness that surrounded their time in the bush. They continued to worry about their children born in captivity, even after exiting the LRA, even though all participants had lost contact with their children after leaving the bush. Participants emphasized that this loss

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[42] Myriam Denov, *Child Soldiers: Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010; Myriam Denov, «Child Soldiers and Iconography: Portrayals and (Mis) Representations», *Children and Society*, 26/4 (2011), pp. 280-292; Catarina Martins, «The dangers of the single story», *op. cit.*, pp. 434-446.

[43] Myriam Denov, *Child Soldiers: Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front*, *op. cit.*; Alcinda Honwana, *Child soldiers in Africa*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011; Michael G. Wessells, *Child soldiers: From violence to protection*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2006.

[44] Sofie Vindevogel et al., «Forced conscription of children during armed conflict», *op. cit.*, pp. 551-562; Angela Veale and Aki Stavrou, «Former Lord's Resistance Army child soldier abductees», *op. cit.*, pp. 273-292; Grace Akello, Annemiek Richters, and Ria Reis, «Reintegration of former child soldiers in northern Uganda», *op. cit.*, pp. 229-243.

[45] Sverker Finnström, *Living with bad surroundings, op. cit.*; Anthony Vinci, «The strategic use of fear by the Lord's Resistance Army», *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 16/3 (2005), pp. 360-381.

[46] Myriam Denov, «Children born of wartime rape», *op. cit.*, and Myriam Denov et al., «Mothering in the Aftermath of Forced Marriage», *op. cit.*, pp. 158-176.

of contact in no way altered their ongoing care and concern as fathers. However, both by participants' reports, and the nuances offered by our local partner organization, it appears that participants had not generally engaged in efforts to find their children or re-establish a relationship with them. It is thus entirely possible that participants had presented themselves in an overly positive light, as concerned parents.

Within the unique context of forced marriage, our male participants reported holding complex roles and perspectives. Their stories and narratives demonstrate how they played an active role in propagating and enacting forced marriage, *and* in some cases, felt trapped by the coercion surrounding this practice. They reported having been forced to marry, *and* had learned to «make the best of it»; while at times rationalizing, minimizing, or erasing the violent and horrific realities of sexual violence and forced wives within the process. Indeed, in addition to their direct participation in armed conflict, interviewees held multiple identities: they were simultaneously perpetrators of violence, captives, commanders, husbands, and fathers.

Conclusion

We have discussed herein the dangers of a single story as it relates to men who exited the LRA after fathering children through forced marriage. Participants spoke of their complex views and experiences relating to their time in the bush. They described the justifications given by the LRA for introducing forced marriage, which included the prevention of civilian rape and the spread of HIV within the armed group. Participants also described how effective forced marriage was at preventing abductees from escaping. Furthermore, the men interviewed felt conflicted about their own bush marriage. Despite having had limited choice regarding these unions, participants described how they had learned to «make the best» of their relationship with their «bush wife». They described how a spouse could offer protection, support and comfort, within an environment of sustained violence. Nevertheless, participants at times acknowledged that forced marriage was coercive, highlighting the sexual violence implied within this practice. Yet, for the most part, it appeared as though they underplayed the severity of the sexual violence that had occurred (by denying their involvement, or obfuscating the age of the girls selected, for instance). On the other hand, participants seemed less conflicted about their relationship to their children. Fathers reported loving their children unconditionally, and strove to ensure their wellbeing during and after the bush.

In this paper, we have drawn from the experiences of ex-LRA men to provide a more nuanced picture of forced marriage in the LRA. The self-reports of men who had risen in ranks within the LRA after be-

ing abducted, suggest that their experiences were far more complex than a monolithic narrative of «perpetratorhood» allows for. Further underscoring the danger of the single story, a number of authors, in relation to the indictment of Dominic Ongwen, have grappled with the adequacy of formal legal mechanisms in holding men accountable who have both been victims of, and perpetrated acts of brutal violence.[47] This paper points to a number of areas that warrant further investigation in relation to these larger questions of accountability. Namely, how is forced marriage being framed in legal discourse? How can legal proceedings account for the ways in which men might simultaneously perpetrate *and* be victims of forced marriage? What might be the impacts of long-term captivity on individual agency within armed groups? The self-report of men who became commanders within the LRA, highlights the complexity of participants' experiences, their (mitigated) agency, in a context where they were both powerful and powerless; coerced and coercive, victims *and* perpetrators. However, as Drumbl highlights, criminal law may not be well suited to grapple with such «blurred lines» given it's imperative to categorize: «guilty or not guilty, persecuted or persecutor, abused or abuser, right or wrong, powerful or powerless».[48] While Ongwen is being tried at the International Criminal Court, as an alleged war criminal, facing a potential life sentence,[49] the real-world, legal consequences of choosing between the single story of «victim» *or* «perpetrator» are made apparent. There is an urgent need to explore mechanisms to address complex acts of war-time violence which dichotomous categories of «guilt» and «innocence» cannot fully capture.

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[47] Mark Drumbl, «Victims Who Victimize», *op. cit.*; Omer Aijazi and Erin Baines, «Relationality, Culpability and Consent in Wartime», *op. cit.*, pp. 463-483; Erin Baines, «Forced Marriage as a Political Project», *op. cit.*, pp. 405-417.

[48] Mark Drumbl, «Victims Who Victimize», *op. cit.*, p. 218.

[49] «Questions and Answers on the LRA Commander Dominic Ongwen and the ICC», *Human Rights Watch* (5 December 2016), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/12/05/questions-and-answers-lra-commander-dominic-ongwen-and-icc#Q10> [last time accessed 34/10/2018].