The Lord’s Resistance Army’s Forced Wife System

Watye Ki Gen & CAP International
The Lord’s Resistance Army’s Forced Wife System

A Collective Portrait Created by Female Returnees

Produced by Watye Ki Gen & CAP International
Background:

This publication is a joint initiative of Watye Ki Gen and Children/Youth as Peacebuilders (CAP International). It began as a participatory action research project initiated by CAP International. But this work prompted members of the group to create their own community organisation. Watye Ki Gen is now registered as a community organisation based in Gulu District, northern Uganda. A close partnership with CAP International continues.

Watye Ki Gen’s membership consists of female returnees who were abducted by the Lord’s Resistance Army and held in captivity by this rebel group. Watye Ki Gen is working to strengthen their collective voice in transitional justice mechanisms. The focus of their work is on the rights and needs of children born in captivity.

CAP International is an international charity that supports the participation of young people in peacebuilding and transitional justice. A major focus for CAP International’s work is the prevention of sexual violence, support for gender equality and advocacy for the rights of children born of war.

Credit Notes:

1. The report’s content and analysis is based on the information and discussion provided by the participants in the project’s workshops and interviews.

2. Images in this report were produced from art workshops conducted with female returnees.

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Arach Janet and Lakor Atim Angela also provided additional background information.

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For additional information on Watye Ki Gen and CAP International please see CAP’s website: (Watye Ki Gen is also establishing a FACEBook site.)

www.childrenyouthaspeacebuilders.ca
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Introduction

Sexual violence is a common weapon of war in today’s armed conflicts. But how this weapon is used differs with the nature of the war and the military strategies created by the leaders. This report focuses on northern Uganda. It describes how Joseph Kony, as General of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), organized and implemented a forced wife system as a critical part of his military operations. As one female explained, “You have to understand that the whole way the girls were treated was part of their overall strategy. How they controlled girls was an important part of what the LRA did.”

The information and analysis in this report are based on interviews and workshops with female returnees over the past 16 years, from 1997 – 2013. Many quotes are from workshops conducted in the summer of 2012. In these sessions female returnees spoke of a strong desire to use their voice, to make sure that their past mattered. As they noted, many researchers and journalists have spoken for them. They are eager to speak on their own behalf.

As part of northern Uganda’s recovery from a long, brutal war there have been many debates on memory and transitional justice. An accurate understanding of the past is part of working towards a different future. It is a complicated history, with competing truths and different experiences. Females who lived as forced wives inside the LRA system, often for many years, have a special knowledge to contribute.

Looking forward, what are the priorities for female returnees? The majority of these young women are mothers, having given birth while held captive by the Lord’s Resistance Army. These pregnancies were the result of continual sexual violence by the commander husbands. These children and their mothers continue to struggle to find a place back inside their families and communities. This is not an easy task and one that cannot be done alone.

As northern Uganda moves forward, a collective effort to ensure the identity, care and nurturing of children born in captivity will be a crucial part of the Acholi community’s rebuilding of its future.
The Masks

The masks on the cover were made during the project workshops held in 2012 and 2013. These workshops (as well as earlier sessions) included a variety of art activities to relax participants and encourage them to think with the head and the heart. Memories have many dimensions.

In making their masks participants used colour to symbolize their feelings about the time in the bush as well as their present situations. The masks also served a practical function to ensure anonymity when participants were giving their testimonies. Girls continue to feel and fear the social stigma of having been a forced wife of a LRA commander. In respect for privacy the report also uses colour self-portraits (another workshop activity) rather than photographs to complement individual stories and opinions.

We have put different colours on our mask to represent the things that we have been hearing and saying to each other.

The black represents the bad memories that we still hold in our minds and hearts. The grey is the back and forth between the memories and the present. The green represents our future from the dirty memory to something better.

We hope that our future is opening. It is a kind of joy – we are becoming more happy and happy for our future. So that is why we put on the lipstick and the bright colours around the mouth.

It is for what we have to say.
Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the assistance of many individuals and organizations whose long-standing commitment to social justice has been critical to our work.

First of all we would like to thank World Vision’s Children of War Program who have been a friend of this project and work with female returnees for many years. We are so grateful for their generosity and partnership at both the individual and organizational level.

Over the years many organizations have provided assistance. This includes CAP Uganda, NGO Forum (northern Uganda), War Child Holland, War Child Canada, CARITAS Counselling Centre. We enjoy a good partnership with JRP (Justice and Reconciliation Project). The Gulu District Office always has an open door and good advice.

We hope that we have remembered everyone and apologize to those that we have forgotten to include.
The Process

This is first and foremost a participatory research project. As noted in the introduction, it formally began in the summer of 2012 but is based on work that has been taking place since 1997. It focuses on the voice of female returnees, those who were abducted by the Lord’s Resistance Army and ordered to be forced wives of the LRA commanders.

The project’s objective was to create a collective portrait and descriptive analysis of the LRA’s forced wife system. This is based on the voice of former ting tings (young girls), first wives, wives of the LRA high commanders and those who were given to sergeants in the battalions. Some were held in captivity for as long as fifteen years; others were able to escape after several months.

The coordinators of this project (also returnees) spent a great deal of care organizing the process. Participants repeatedly identified the workshop process as valuable and volunteered their time, at considerable personal sacrifice. Over 85 females took part.

The workshops were exclusively female. All participants had spent time in the bush. Careful attention was given to ensure security and anonymity. The sessions included art activities to make the link between emotional and factual accounting of experiences. Examples include community maps, mask making, colour self-portraits, body maps and story drawings. This qualitative work was combined with quantitative data collection on various aspects of girls’ experiences. In all the workshops connections were made between individual stories and the overall system created by Joseph Kony and his high commanders.

This was a complex undertaking. There were considerable changes over the 20 years of the war and this was reflected in the LRA’s treatment of females. Girls who were taken as young children (7 – 8 years) grew up inside the LRA world. Their experiences are, of course, distinct from those who were older when abducted. It is a great credit to the workshop participants that everyone listened with respect to the stories of others, even when it differed from their experiences.

Ensuring the report’s accuracy was a top priority - not just facts but also the tone and emphasis. A draft report was presented and reviewed by a select committee as well as a larger gathering (85 participants). These evaluation sessions were very rewarding as new information and perspectives were provided. We thank the many members of Watye Ki Gen who gave their time to this process and trust that we have been true to their contributions.
Glossary

First Wife: A first wife was just that – the first girl to have been given as a wife to a commander. The high-ranking commanders often had many wives.


Lord's Resistance Army (LRA): A rebel force created in 1987 under the leadership of Joseph Kony. The LRA was established to overthrow the Uganda Government. It became well known for its atrocities against civilians and the abduction of children.

Originals: This term referred to people who had been inside the Lord’s Resistance Army for many years and had grown accustomed to life in the bush. Both males and females were originals.

Position: A safe place where the LRA would gather to have meals and rest. There were many positions throughout northern Uganda and then later, with Operation Iron Fist, in Sudan as the rebels were moving.

Senior Originals: This referred to followers of Joseph Kony who had joined him in the early days. Some of the senior originals had their roots in Alice Lakwena’s Holy Spirit Mobile Force, though Lakwena distanced herself from Kony as she did not agree with his strategies of attacking civilians.

The Bay: A secret location in northern Uganda where the LRA brought their wounded and sick for treatment. Pregnant girls would often be taken here.

The Command: The LRA headquarters in southern Sudan included an area where the high-ranking commanders lived.

The Command Altar: This referred to the group of high-ranking commanders who regularly met with Joseph Kony and participated in decisions on the LRA strategies.

Ting Tings: This name was given to girls who were younger and had not yet begun to menstruate, so they couldn’t be given as a wife to a commander. The LRA believed that the ting ting’s purity gave them a special power that could be used to help ensure the success of LRA missions. Ting tings often were given to the wives to help in domestic work.

UPDF: Ugandan People’s Defence Force
Chronology of Northern Uganda’s War:

1986 – 2013

1986  Yoweri Museveni is sworn in as President of Uganda on January 26, 1986. This follows the overthrow of the Milton Obote regime by the National Resistance Army, under Museveni’s command. Obote is originally from Northern Uganda. Alice Lakwana establishes the Holy Spirit Movement, an armed resistance to Museveni’s government.

1987  Despite some success, the Holy Spirit is decisively defeated by the Uganda People’s Defence Force. Lakwana escapes to Kenya. Her followers disband and new groups are formed. One of these is the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) under Joseph Kony. Kony claims spiritual powers and a family connection to Lakwana.

1988  The LRA begins its activities with surprise attacks on villages. An objective is to demonstrate that the Museveni government cannot properly protect northern Uganda. Abductions are usually only for a short time when villagers were required to carry looted supplies.

1990  The LRA continues its activities with attacks on villages throughout the northern Uganda region. In these early days, the LRA obtains some sympathy from the community. This is partly in response to the actions of government troops, who are often brutal and undisciplined in their treatment of the civilian population.

1991  Museveni’s government launches “Operation North” to eliminate the LRA. These measures greatly anger Kony. In retaliation he orders a series of massacres and atrocities. This includes amputations, mutilations, setting fire on villages and the abduction of children.


1996  The Ugandan Army (UPDF) uses aggressive tactics to force families out of their homes, requiring them to live in IDP camps as a protective measure.

1997 – 1999  The war continues, with high levels of violence and abductions of children. In January 1997 the LRA launches a major attack on the town of Lamwo, Kitgum County, killing over 400 people. People living in the villages feel great fear and vulnerability. Many abandon their homes to live in IDP camps, despite the fact that these are crowded, desperate places.

2000  Following the signing of a peace agreement with the Sudan Government, the Ugandan Government passes an Amnesty Law, which guarantees that returnees will not be charged for their actions while with the rebels.

2002  In September, the Army issues a 48-hour ultimatum to the civilian population, saying they must move to the IDP camps or they will be regarded as rebels. The Religious Leaders’ Peace Initiative (ARLPI) conducts many meetings with the LRA leadership, desperately trying to bring both sides together to discuss peace. The “night commuters” begin their walks: thousands of children leave their homes each evening to walk into larger towns in order to avoid abduction. The Museveni Government launches “Operation Iron Fist”.

2003 - 2005  Museveni asks the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate Kony and LRA leaders for war crimes. In 2005 the ICC issues warrants for Joseph Kony and his top lieutenants. The war receives greater attention from the international community. The violence continues -over 1.5 million people are now living inside the horrible conditions of the IDP camps.

2006 – 2008  A tentative truce is signed on August 26, 2006. Peace negotiations are initiated and held in Juba, southern Sudan, between the Uganda government and representatives of the LRA. Both sides accuse the other of acting in bad faith. Joseph Kony boycotts the signing of the final peace agreement. But the LRA no longer has a base in southern Sudan or the capacity to function in northern Uganda. It retreats to the DRC and Central Africa Republic and repeats its strategy of abducting children in these countries.

People gradually move back to their villages to begin the difficult process of re-establishing their homes and gardens. The Uganda Government establishes the Peace, Reconstruction and Development Program (PRDP) in 2007.

2009 - 2013  Various reconciliation initiatives are created. There are renewed efforts to capture Joseph Kony, but these meet with no success. In 2013 the Ugandan Government renews the Amnesty Law. As well, a draft proposal for a truth telling process is presented.
1. The LRA’s “forced wife” system provided the structure for its use of sexual violence as a weapon of war.

The LRA’s military vision and operations required absolute domination over sexuality and sexual activity. In this system, sex was contained inside a forced wife system. Girls were captured and given to commander husbands. Sex was understood as a privilege only granted to officers. The LRA also believed that female sexuality was a wild thing that had to be strictly controlled through the harsh actions of the male commanders. As the wives of these men, girls were required to obey any and every command and to never refuse them sexual services.

While this was the LRA code and offenders were severely punished, if caught, female returnees were often raped by the abduction squads. This would occur in the time between being taken from their homes and their arrival at the command “positions” in northern Uganda. Girls were warned that they would be killed if they told. These violations were usually committed by senior original boys.

2. As defined by international humanitarian law, the Lord’s Resistance Army is guilty of “forced transfer of populations and the enforced disappearance of persons.”

The LRA staged many raids on villages, schools, IDP camps and households. This included looting, the committing of atrocities and most of all, and the abduction of children. According to a CAP Uganda survey (conducted in 2010) 67% of those abducted were less than 18 years of age.

Young people were removed from their homes to become part of Joseph Kony’s “new generation”. Children were preferred for several reasons: 1) It was thought that they would not know the area well enough to be able to escape; 2) It was believed that they would be easier to indoctrinate; and 3) It was recognized as an excellent tactic to terrorize families.

The LRA preferred to abduct girls of 12 – 13 years. They were understood to be “fresh” and the perfect age to be given to commanders. Occasionally Joseph Kony would issue special orders for younger children, particularly girls. With boys, there were no real preferences in age – young males of any age were taken, from about 9 to 16 – 17 years. Once children were captured, they essentially disappeared. Parents were unable to receive information on their whereabouts, except sometimes from
returnees. During the LRA’s most active years (late 1990s – early 2000s) new abductees were removed to the LRA’s headquarters in southern Sudan.¹ New abductees were told that they must abandon their former identity, now they were soldiers of the Lord’s Resistance Army.

The LRA was deeply suspicious of girls’ loyalty, more so than boys. They believed that girls would take any opportunity to try to escape. In practical terms this meant that girls usually remained in southern Sudan and were closely guarded. Many girls were held by the LRA for eight years. For boys, the average was closer to two to three years – they usually were taken to northern Uganda for fighting so had more opportunities to escape.

Joseph Kony rarely participated directly in abductions. Instead, he mostly remained in Sudan, sometimes travelling to the border area. However, he was in contact with his commanders in Uganda through radio communication and would regularly issue orders to them.

3. **Girls were repeatedly raped by their commander husbands.**

Shortly after their arrival at LRA Headquarters the girls were called together so that the commanders could select them. They had already been questioned to confirm that they had not been “interfered with” on the journey to the LRA headquarter. These girls were supposed to be a prize only for the commanders.

LRA commanders preferred young, “fresh” girls. Various techniques were used to ensure that female abductees met these requirements: spraying of water on bare breasts to see if they would “perk up” or checking of hair to see if the back area was flattened (sure sign of sexual activity, it was believed) were two of the most common.

Various reasons were given for this emphasis on purity. Partly it was to limit the possibility of HIV infection. But it also was consistent with the LRA doctrine, where girls were to be completely possessed by their commander husband. Previous sexual activity undermined this ownership.

According to the LRA code, a commander husband could “use” his new wife sexually once she had begun to menstruate. The LRA believed that this was at the age of 11 - 12 years. Younger girls (those called “ting tings”) were not supposed to be raped but many commander husbands disobeyed this rule. Girls were expected to be available for sexual services whenever their commanders called them. As the head commander, Joseph Kony had first pick. Commanders would often radio ahead with news of a particularly beautiful girl as this might translate into a promotion. He was also known for his love of younger girls, though he usually did not use a girl until she had begun to menstruate.

¹ The Lord’s Resistance Army was primarily based in southern Sudan until 2006 – 2007. Up until 2004 they enjoyed the support of the Sudan Government. However, in that year the Sudan Government bowed to pressure from the Uganda Government and the international community and no longer welcomed Joseph Kony and his rebel force.
According to the female returnees in this study, Kony had 120 wives in 2009. But as many died or were able to escape (particularly in 2004) Kony’s total number of wives from the time when he first established his rebel force in 1986 is more accurately at around 300.

Each commander had his habits. Some raped a new girl shortly after she arrived. Others waited until they had finished their military training. Commanders would have favourites and a kind of rotation system where a girl might be used continually for a week or so and then substituted for another one.

4. **As defined by international humanitarian law, girls were enslaved by the LRA commanders.**

The most powerful commanders had many wives. As officers received a higher rank, they obtained more wives, as is demonstrated in the accompanying chart.

Wives were the exclusive property of the commanders. They were expected to be passive and uncomplaining of any treatment these men decided to inflict upon them. Except in rare situations, commanders were not punished for abusive actions against their wives, something that was common.

Girls had no freedom of movement. Most were not permitted to go outside their compound, except to fetch water, work in the gardens or participate in military missions. They could not speak to others freely. Anything but necessary conversation with male guards could result in a beating. They were expected to salute their husbands and obey every order, however absurd.

Though considerable attention has been given to the sexual abuse suffered by the LRA’s forced wives, it is important to remember that their enslavement also included high levels of physical labour. Girls who were not pregnant were expected to maintain and harvest the commanders’ gardens. In addition to these long hours of work in extremely hot conditions, girls had to look after the compound, care for children, do laundry and prepare the commander’s meals, often to very exacting demands. Girls who did not meet all these requirements or who showed any level of resistance were harshly punished.

But “enslaved” does not mean that girls were slaves. Girls worked to maintain their dignity and internal freedom. Some refused sexual services and were severely punished for this. Most created new names, bush names. This allowed them to keep their identities separate from this horrible reality. It also had a practical use as a safety measure so that commanders were not able to identify their families.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Age when abducted</th>
<th>No of years in captivity</th>
<th>Husband’s Rank (Arrival)</th>
<th>No of Wives (Arrival)</th>
<th>Husband’s Rank (When she left)</th>
<th>No of Wives (When she left)</th>
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<td>nil</td>
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<td>Lieutenant</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10 yrs</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2nd Lieutenant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Major</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. **Girls were forced to serve as both combatants and wives.**

Both boys and girls served as combatants for the Lord’s Resistance Army. For boys, this military work made up the bulk of their duties. Girls, however, were expected to serve on two fronts – wives in the commanders’ compounds, soldiers on the battlefield. In one she was required to be passive; in the other fiercely aggressive.

Girls functioned inside a bizarre mixture of domestic and military life. For example, all girls had to salute their husbands, both at home and on military missions. There was one salute for the home, another when they were in military uniform. Some husbands wanted their wives to accompany them on military missions, as a kind of military escort.

Several girls, particularly the originals, took pride in their fighting abilities and would sometimes be rewarded with a rank of sergeant. These females would be in charge of a unit, issuing orders to male soldiers under their command. But on returning to the headquarters this girl immediately reverted to wife status and could receive punishment from these same male youth, on orders from her husband.

“It is possible that a girl soldier could be given a group who was under her guidance during a battle. For example, in my case, I was a sergeant. When we were out, I was in charge. But back at the headquarters, wasn’t in charge of anyone. I was a wife.”

All new abductees – males and females - received military training. Those who came immediately to southern Sudan received a two-week training in marching, gun maintenance, shooting and firing techniques. Those who stayed long in northern Uganda were just given basic training on shooting and the care of weapons.

In 2002 when the LRA was no longer welcome by the Sudan Government (and being chased by the UPDF), the position of girls became even more difficult. The two roles – as wives and combatants – merged. The LRA was constantly on the move. Girls were expected to look after their children; carry food for their husbands; provide cooked meals and participate in fighting. These were impossible demands. Many females died from fighting or were killed by the LRA because they could not keep up.

6. **The Lord’s Resistance Army is guilty of “forced pregnancy” as defined by international humanitarian law.**

Joseph Kony repeatedly stated, “We have to fill the world with our children.” In the early days these proclamations were an angry response to the Acholi community’s resistance to his ambitions. But this idea – of producing a new clan – later became a priority for Kony. He saw this as the solution for northern Uganda, to create a new class of people who had, from his perspective, benefitted from LRA training and life in the bush. At one point, Joseph Kony stated that each girl should produce 15 children for the “new generation.” His commanders understood that their job was the forced
impregnation of their wives. Kony himself was active in making his wives pregnant and was known to be exceptionally fond of its children.

Commanders would repeatedly use a girl until she became pregnant. Then she would be ignored. (Many female returnees joked that they often wished to become pregnant so that they would be spared from having to be with the husbands.) New mothers were avoided until they stopped breastfeeding. But soon after they would be called again and required to provide sexual services.

For most girls, pregnancy was welcomed. It meant that the husbands would no longer be calling them. They would often receive praise and better food. They were relieved of hard physical work and were not allowed to go on military missions. All this was a relief. However, they also were more confined. Pregnant girls were closely watched to ensure that they did nothing to bring on a miscarriage. Their job was to ensure that the pregnancy reached a successful conclusion.

Those who did not get pregnant were often punished. On producing a child, some wives were given a military ranking in recognition of their good service.

7. The LRA had a complex relationship to children born in captivity:
   - In the early days they maintained that the children belonged to them.
   - But later, especially as the LRA’s fortunes were diminishing, they began to lose interest.
   - Currently, few former LRA commanders are willing to acknowledge their parenthood of children born in captivity.

A returnee remembers that shortly after she gave birth to her child, Joseph Kony arrived at her hut. He picked up the child, admired her beauty and said that she closely resembled him. From that point on the child was a favourite:

   “He liked my first girl a lot. But when he saw my second daughter he said that she resembled him so much. That made him very, very happy. He liked babies so much. When I was there, there were 62 children of his. But after I left he added many more children.”

This attitude was repeated in stories of other female returnees. Commander fathers were generally affectionate with their children, often providing them favours. Having many children was an important status symbol.

Girls were instructed to take good care of “our” (i.e. the LRA’s) children. At one point the LRA operated a nursery school so that their children would be properly educated. The power of the fathers was strongly asserted – these were their children. They seemed to equally love boys and girls. The mother’s role was to look after their offspring for them.
Instead of allowing a mother to develop a deep attachment to her child, the LRA command insisted that the mothers should treat all children equally.

Despite this situation, strong bonds developed between mothers and their children. Many female returnees say that the love of their child is what kept them going during the harsh times with the LRA. This rapport reached almost telepathic levels in times of great stress. For example, one returnee tells the story of her escape with two mothers:

“Both had babies of about six months. We had talked about escaping before – we had finalized our plan that day while working in the garden.

But when it came to actually doing it, actually escaping, the mothers were frozen with fear. They were so worried that they wouldn’t be able to move quickly – or quietly with their babies.

At about 1:00 am we crept out of the camp. All we took was some warm clothing for the babies. We walked until dawn, going through dangerous terrain. The babies, though young, seemed to understand what was going on. They didn’t cry at all.”

This kind of story was often repeated. When mothers were in dangerous situations their babies could sense it and would not cry or make a fuss.

The LRA’s sense of ownership of children shifted considerably once they were under sustained attack from the UPDF and the vision of a “new clan” was no longer feasible (if it ever had been). Children were seen more as a liability than an asset, particularly when they were on the move. In the scramble for survival, the collective sense of childcare gave way and mothers became responsible for the safety and care of their specific children. This, of course, was extremely difficult, even more so for those who were pregnant.

Many female returnees and their children have returned home. They are facing new complications and difficulties. Children known to have been born in captivity suffer from stigma. The fathers are often nowhere to be seen.

Acholi clan chiefs are reluctant to acknowledge a child without certain proof of his/her biological father. This is complicated by the fact that many commanders adopted bush names and refused to provide any information on their backgrounds to their wives. At the time, they said that this past was irrelevant. Now, the situation is much different.
“As girls coming back from the bush, we often hear our neighbours whispering about us. They whisper, “See that girl who was with the rebels. She is a killer. She killed people and see, there; she also has a LRA baby, LRA children too.”

So it is different for boys and girls. The boys come back without children. But we, we all have children from our time with the rebels. They are our children. You cannot leave this child. She is yours.

But if you want to make a new life, you will always suffer because of this child. And the child will suffer too, because of you, because of your past.

It is harder for girls. And it is hard. Because people will say things to you and those things will live with you. It stays in your heart.

People do not let a girl forget.”

8. The LRA’s “first wife” system was an instrument used to maintain control of females.

After a commander selected a girl she was ordered to report to his compound. This began her life both as a LRA forced wife and as part of the “first wife system.”

The “first wife” system was created by the wives as a way of establishing a hierarchy and relationships inside the compound. Each wife knew her number – it was based on the time of her arrival and how many wives there were before her. The first wife was literally that – the first female to have been given to a particular commander.

The first wife held a pivotal position. Unlike the other wives, she had some autonomy and could occasionally assert her will. As the first wife, she maintained an enforcer role and had the ear of the commander husband. Her job was to ensure the smooth running of the compound. In practice, this included both the commander’s and her notion of what “smooth running” entailed.

For most first wives it was important that her power was maintained and that other wives occupied a subservient position. In many ways they copied the habits of their commander husbands by imposing
unreasonable demands, being very jealous and orchestrating punishments for those they saw as competitors for their position. Because of this, the first wife was often feared and hated.

It is true that many first wives mistreated others, particularly the ting tings. But this must be understood inside the context in which they were operating. It is quite possible that this was deliberately encouraged, as it ensured that the wives did not form alliances. The system required that people mistrusted each other and fought for their own survival, understanding that this would often be at the expense of others.

9. **LRA commanders’ treatment of girls fills the international humanitarian criteria of torture as a crime against humanity.**

The commanders’ treatment of girls had two main components. On the one hand they maintained a strict control of all their actions – this was partly based on their sense of themselves as military commanders whose word was law. They clearly enjoyed asserting their power. But they also used their wives as an object to vent their frustrations and play out cruel fantasies. As female returnees noted, many of these men were crazy.

Girls were regularly canned, kicked and beaten with guns. Any cry of pain resulted in an increase in punishment. If a meal was found to be lacking, a commander might force the girl who did the cooking to eat until she was sick, all the while screaming at her about her poor abilities as a wife. The commanders, particularly Joseph Kony, were extremely jealous. If a girl was found to be talking to a guard or showing the smallest level of friendliness to the male escorts, she would likely be canned at least 50 strokes. Some commanders regularly punished their wives, just to keep them in line.

Girls who demonstrated liveliness would be tortured, as way to break their spirit. For example, some were forced to stand in the sun for 5 – 6 hours at a time holding bricks or with their arms above their head. There are stories of girls being forced to lie on a stinging anthill for several hours.

On a psychological/emotional level, girls were also subjected to severe treatment. The commander husbands would repeatedly criticize them, calling them worthless and stupid and would repeatedly threaten them, saying that they were just waiting to kill them. So there were many levels of torture – of the heart, body and mind.
10. The LRA system involved persecution on the grounds of gender as defined by international humanitarian law.

As this summary demonstrates, the Lord’s Resistance Army treated girls with great cruelty. It was not enough for the LRA to just use girls as combatants, as they did with male youth. Instead they also required that girls were instruments to live out their commitment to male supremacy and violence. It is no accident that girls were punished and subjected to high levels of humiliation. This was required to enforce their world order where females were required to be subservient to men in all ways.

To be a female inside the LRA meant that you could expect no consideration or respect. It was a life filled with sexual violence, high levels of work, forced pregnancies, constant threats, and physical/emotional torture – just because you were a girl. As Grace, a female returnee stated, the way girls were treated was an important part of the LRA’s overall strategy.

Another female returnee made the comparison between the position of girls and boys in this way:

“The boys did not have to be a wife as well as a fighter. Boys would be instructed to beat a girl if she did something wrong. For the boys, once they agreed to be soldiers, they were not tortured so much. But for the girls they continued to be tortured…. girls were at the bottom.”
This is the man I was given to.
It is the face of death.

The LRA’s Forced Wife System:

How It Worked
Overview

The Lord’s Resistance Army’s forced wife system was integral to its operations. It was a critical component of both its military strategies and management structures. Even more important was the fact that it put into practice the LRA (and Joseph Kony’s) view of the world. This included:

- **Male superiority:** The LRA system demanded female passivity and unquestioning service to male demands.

- **Distrust of females:** The LRA world was male dominated – females who thrived in its system demonstrated their loyalty to men, often at the expense of other girls and women.

- **A strict hierarchy:** The LRA was no democracy. Its system was organized to assert the superiority of a given few. All privilege and power was oriented to this group – the role of others was to do as ordered. Kony’s position was strengthened by the belief that he possessed spiritual power. Females were at the bottom. This was reflected in both its military and domestic operations – in fact the lines between these two worlds were blurred.

- **Control of sexual behaviour and suspicion of females’ sexuality.**

- **The use of violence to impose Kony’s vision of how the world should be organized.**

These were not random actions of sadistic individuals, though that did exist. Instead, the LRA high command carefully planned its system.

The following pages describe how these goals were put into practice. This includes information on abductions, the selection of girls, sexual violations against abductees, the domestic organization of the LRA headquarters, torture, the first wife system, punishments and combat activities.
The Day I was Abducted

I was 13. You can see in the picture that I was coming home from school. There I am with my schoolbag.

The rebels were hiding in the bushes. When I got closer they shouted, “Hey you, come over here.” I did that.
Then one pointed his gun at me and said, “Take off your blouse.” I did that. Then all I had was my skirt.

They tied my hands behind my back. They said, “Walk.” I did that.
There was a man carrying a RPG in front and another one behind. I was all by myself, just me and these two soldiers, just me and them. I was so scared. I thought they were going to kill me. Instead they took me to a camp where there other girls and boys.

They never gave me back my blouse.

1. Abduction of Girls

I was just on my way to school.
I was walking along the road...
I was sleeping in my bed....

Abduction raids occurred at all times of the day and night. Rebels would suddenly appear in villages, family compounds, on the road or in gardens. Many children were taken on their way to or from school. Attacks at night were common, as families were sleeping and vulnerable. Those who resisted were killed or beaten. Atrocities were common with amputations of hands, feet, arms and legs and the cutting of lips and ears.

These were quick operations. Children were grabbed and taken before resistance could be organized. This may be one reason why raping of villagers did not take place – it would require precious extra time. But even more importantly, this was not part of the LRA’s strategies.
The abductions had two main intentions: to terrorize the local population and to provide supplies (food, materials and children) for the LRA operations. What better way to prove the Ugandan Government’s lack of capacity to protect than to capture a parent’s child?

The LRA command had a strict code on sexual activity, one that affirmed the power of its commanders inside an imitation of traditional Acholi habits. Sex was limited to a bizarre husband/wife structure. Only commanders were allowed to participate: they were the husbands; the captured females the wives. Members of the abduction squads were not part of this world. Instead their job was to service it by providing the adolescent girls who were given to the LRA commanders. As one returnee explained, “During my time, they told me that the Holy Spirit (as represented by Joseph Kony) never wanted girls over 15 years.”

Abduction squads were frequently led by the senior originals. This included both males and girls, though there were more boys. These teams fanned out from a command post, known as the position. They were in regular contact with their commanders via walkie-talkies. These men would receive their orders from Kony, based in southern Sudan.

Abduction tactics varied with the context. Those captured while walking on the road often described how the rebels stopped them for information or directions.

One girl remembered her abduction this way:

“They said, we are not going to take you people, you are just going to show us the way.”
I was shaking because of fear. I said, “The road is there, now let me go.”
They said, “No.”

2. First Selection

LRA abduction raids had many objectives. The LRA command was constantly monitoring the situation to ensure that these requirements were filled. While new recruits were always needed, there were times when specific age groups were required. For example, if they didn’t have enough younger boys, Kony would issue a command for this population to be targeted.

Once abductees had been removed from their villages, a first “culling” was done to ensure that those captured fit the LRA’s selection criteria. This process was quite different for males and females.

New male abductees were viewed as dispensable and of limited value. The senior originals dismissed these boys as weak, lacking the skills and toughness necessary for LRA fighters. They would treat them harshly, testing to see if they could survive the rigours of the bush. Of course, many could not and any
signs of weakness met with severe punishment. According to male returnees, the originals gave them little food or water during this time. Many died or were killed.

Perhaps because of this, few boys were sent back, regardless of their age. It was probably assumed that many would not survive, so there was a need for a big population.

For girls, it was different. While they would be expected to serve as fighters, their more important role was as wives of LRA commanders. Abduction squads were always eager to find beautiful girls – this was a source of great pride for them. The acquisition of a particularly attractive girl could result in a promotion for a commander. So, unlike for the boys, a screening of girls occurred after the abduction.

The most highly prized females were those who were “fresh”:

“They gathered the newly abducted together. They ordered girls over 15 years to go off to the side. They said, “If you are that age, you can leave, because we know that you have an infection so we don’t want you. The ones that are 14 or less, they must stay.”

“One of the first things they did was to check to see if you had already had sex. The method was to look at the backs of the girls’ heads. If it was flat or there was no hair, this meant that you had been lying on your back, having sex. So you were sent back.”

“They wanted younger females who are fresh. They said that they could see from your face – that you could not hide your true character. They believed that if you are 11, you should be having your period. So you are old enough then to be given to a commander.

“About the breasts and the breasts sticking out straight – yes that is true, but it is partly also because this is the way that the younger ones are, and they always want the young ones. The breasts are supposed to be straight. So they would make you take off your blouse and then they would sprinkle water on you, to see if they stick out straight, they were examining your breasts to see if you were truly fresh.”
I remember...

It was in the morning hour, around 9 am. I was coming from Kitgum where I was studying. We were in a pickup truck and we were ambushed. I was the only one who survived: all the others were killed. There were 15 of them: two students, the rest were businessmen and women.

There were about 30 rebels – both boys and girls. They were in uniform and were different ages: some were young, about 13; others were about 17 and then some who were old, around 20. There were more boys, only 5 girls. Both the boys and the girls were shooting.

Because I was young the driver had put me in the front with him. The rebels shot the man next to me – I had ducked down so he fell on top of me. My plan was to stay there, under the body, until they had finished looting the truck. I didn’t know that they were going to burn it.

The man who fell on top of me was a very heavy, so it was a big weight on me. I tried to move him a little and the rebels saw me. They screamed, “There is someone in there.” A rebel came to spear me with a bayonet. But another said, “No, let’s look at her first.” They asked me if I was wounded and I told them I wasn’t. They checked me and told me to come outside.

I was just stood there - I wasn’t even scared. I had feared the rebels but at that moment, I was just hopeless. I just watched them - they were shooting the passengers. The driver had been shot in the head but he hadn’t died. They ordered him to take the accelerator out of the truck. After he did that they killed him and set the truck on fire. It exploded.

They came over to me. They took my transport money (it was in an envelope and I had been told to hold it in my hand). They took my shoes. They found a white cock and told me to hold it. They said that if I let it go they would kill me. Then they went back to shooting the ones who were still alive. When they were finished they turned to me and said, “Let’s go now.”
Abduction of Girls and Boys

(Gulu District)

Percentages by Age

Distribution of Abductions of Males By Age, Gulu District
(Percentages)
Source: CAT Survey, 2011, n=2,790

Distribution of Female Abductions By Age, Gulu District
(Percentages)
Source: CAT Survey, 2011, n= 780
The Abduction of Aboke School Students

One of the most famous abductions occurred on October, 1996 at St. Mary’s College Girls Secondary School. This account is from the girl prefect:

“There had been rumours that an attack was coming. Our teachers had been hiding us every night and we were getting tired of it. The night of the attack, Celebration Day, was a holiday so only a few soldiers were available to guard the school.

Kony was known to want “learned girls, school girls”. Maybe this is why St. Mary’s College was targeted. But it was outside the usual range for LRA activities – that is why our parents had sent us there.

The attack took place around 1 am. We were sleeping in the dormitory. The door had a metal bar across it – the rebels started banging on it. They were breaking the windows with their guns. All the girls were hiding under their beds - everyone was scared. Then one girl got up and went over to the door – she opened it for them. I don’t know why.

They pointed their guns at us. We were all shaking with fear – they forced us to go with them. Originally 180 were taken. But the walking was not going well, so the commander sent some back.

Sister (Sister Rachele, the Italian deputy headmistress) chased after us. She had a bag full of money to buy back the students. The LRA commanders called Kony on the walkie-talkie to see what they should do.

We heard Kony asking how many pretty girls there were, if some were fat or white. He ordered them to pick the prettiest ones. They kept changing the number. Kony finally ordered that 30 should be chosen.

The girls tried to look ugly or strange in some way. Some pretended that they didn’t know how to stand or speak. This angered the rebels. They started canning us, saying, “You people are acting like politicians, you think that you can fool us.”

After they had made their selection we started moving. Some girls were crying - the rebels became angry. By this time the government forces were looking for us and they were worried they would find us because of the noise. So they canned us for that. They sent away Sister. Before she left she said to me, “Look after them.”
While there was a continuing preference for early adolescent and pretty girls, special populations would also be identified. Prior to the 1990s, young girls (7 – 11 years) filled an important role in LRA spiritual rituals. Joseph Kony believed that a girl’s purity was a strong force that could be used to ensure the rebels’ safety. These young girls were given the task of anointing troops as they went out on a mission and then praying for their success while they were gone. Kony’s first wife, Fatuma, was reputed to be the first ting ting, having been taken when she was a Primary 3 student, eight years old.

As time went on, young girls were used for other purposes. Joseph Kony was known for his fondness for beautiful young girls. He would groom them, training them to be his future wives. So it was always important to maintain this population. As well, there was always a need for ting tings to help with childcare and to cater to the demands of the first wives.

In the early 2000s, female students became a priority. Many commanders could not read or write. They had spent a long time in the bush and so had little or no education. They wanted students for wives as a status symbol and also to teach them English. The LRA commanders liked to listen to the radio and were eager to be able to understand the BBC news reports.

So, unlike the boys who were just indiscriminately captured and abused, girls were chosen with specific purposes in mind. In the travel back to LRA headquarters in Sudan, this approach was maintained. Boys were harshly treated while girls were protected as future prizes for the commanders.
3. Moving

The marks are for the difficulties from my home to southern Sudan. You see the river on the bottom and the crosses for people who drowned.

“We were running in the bush. We came to a river. I was still holding the cock. It was difficult in the water.

As we were going they were also picking girls and boys. It was during the day so there were not too many people in the villages, sometimes only children. People were coming back from their gardens, so that was the chance to get them.

We – the ones that they had already taken – were in behind. We didn’t see much. We would just see that sometimes they were tying up another one, who would be joining us. In our group there were seven. I was the only female. The rest were very younger, I was the oldest.

They kept me separate from the boys. There were three soldiers in front of me, three behind. If you wanted to go for short call or long call, they would be waiting for you – you couldn’t go far. We were moving in bare feet - you had to go quickly and sometimes you would get a stone and it would hurt you so much. We reached the main place, where there were many, at about five in the afternoon.”
When the abductees arrived at the position they were assigned to commanders whose job it was to supervise their journey back to the headquarters. This was a difficult and emotional time. Arrival at the position symbolized a transition point between their home villages and future life in the bush:

“For many this was a hard moment. But it was important not to show your feelings.

You could not even cry. If they saw that you were sad they would be focusing on you so much, because they knew that your mind was at home. They would be guarding you seriously. It was better that you appeared relaxed, that you talked freely and did not show them that you were worried about home. If you did that, they would think, “Oh, she is now used to our condition, she will stay.” ”

The trip to southern Sudan was tough. There were the physical demands of the bush, of being constantly on the move. The leaders were always forcing them to go quickly – a difficult thing for these children accustomed to village life:

“Walking barefooted is hard. You would be stepping on so many things such as thorns and stones.

Your legs would swell. But you had to be very careful. If they saw that your leg was swollen, they would say, “Oh, you can now rest here.” Then they just killed you. This killing was always done with the people who had asked to rest. Everyone knew they did this.”

“We would move until around mid-day, and then we washed. Then after eating we moved again. In the evening we moved again. So we stopped at three different positions.

They were not mistreating anyone during the day. But on the first night they canned some boys who had tried to escape. There was one person who ran and he was successful. His friends who remained were punished.”

Girls and boys were kept separate and treated differently. Male abductees were hit and canned by the originals as they moved through the bush. If a boy was moving too slowly, he could be killed, with the originals explaining that, “He was delaying us.” This rarely happened to the girls. Girls were given better food than the boys and were expected to be grateful for these favours:
“When we reached a position, they started cooking chicken. They gave it to us [the girls]. We said we didn’t want it. They said, “Why not?” We replied that we were not allowed to eat chicken. They said, “You eat it or we will kill you. So we ate it.”

**Sexual Violence While On The Move**

It is often debated whether girls were raped when they were abducted or during the travel back to the LRA headquarters. The truth is both yes and no. The LRA Command forbid this:

“I was often sent into Uganda and I helped abduct many girls. When we would arrive back they would always ask the girls if anyone had interfered with them. And if one of the girls said yes then that boy or man would be severely punished or killed.

They felt this was a big break with morality and that morality was very important to maintain. They feared that if the younger soldiers went and got their own wives that it would undermine the discipline. It was only the commanders who were supposed to control the girls.”

But these rules could be ignored. According to returnees, the senior original boys would rape female abductees if they got the chance. These men would grab girls and take them into the bush during the march to the positions.

As non-ranking soldiers, originals were normally not eligible to have wives. But they had more latitude than newer recruits, because of their long time in the bush and for their reputation as strong fighters. Within certain bounds, the original boys were a law unto themselves. They were known for their arrogance and assumption that the rules should not apply to them. While they would never openly challenge LRA commanders, they were unofficially known for violating new female abductees. Of course, victims were warned that if they said anything, they would kill them and their friends. This would have been easy to arrange on the trip to the Sudan border.
Arrival: LRA Headquarters, southern Sudan

Those who survived the trip to the LRA headquarters in Sudan were in a wretched condition. Their bodies were bruised from numerous days of marching with little food or water.

“We marched into the camp. The girls were kept separate. As we entered there were eight people with the calabash, they had water with chia nut oils, and they sprinkled us with it. They said it was a kind of welcoming.

They took us to stand under a mango tree. Kony came to welcome us. He looked like a normal man, he had on a uniform, he was looking very smart – he had short hair. He said:

“The people in Uganda are spoiling our name. They say that we are killing people and taking their children. This is unfair. So now that you are here, the newly abducted, we are going to train you as soldiers and then you will become one of us.”

4. Selection of Wives

This selection occurred shortly after the abductees arrived at the LRA headquarters. Both girls and boys were given to the commanders. But the methods and criteria for this selection differed.

For the boys: Commanders were looking for good fighters. But they had little say as to which boys they were given. These decisions rested with the operations commander. He would divide up the new male recruits based on his assessment of each commander’s needs and level of activity. Those who had been successful in missions received the strongest looking boys. The operations commander also ensured that no commander had superior fighting strength. There were always worries of a coup and so care had to be taken to prevent this possibility.

For the girls: If the boys were selected according to their strength, girls were chosen for their looks. Commanders were allowed to make their own selections, from the higher ranking officers on down:

“Kony always had first pick. He had the privilege to choose the ones he liked first. He chose three types: the wives, the young ones who were still growing but soon would be wives – called ting tings – they were sort of in training. And then the smallest, the youngest.
Mostly he [Kony] picked the young ones who in a year of so
would be ready. Kony might pick a very young one – say around
8 years – because he could see that she was already pretty and that
she would be very beautiful when she got older.

Next the top commanders got to choose and so on down.
Nobody could touch us except them – they put water on us. We
had to be totally fresh.”

These selections were done near the operation commander’s place. Girls would be instructed to sit
in a place where they could be viewed:

“We did not know what was happening. Commanders would come and just sit
and watch you and the others. They talked to the operations commander.
You could hear the commander say, “I want this one or that one.”

Then the operations commander would point at someone and say, “Hey, you,
you must go to such and such a commander.” You follow him, you go to his
place. You don’t know anything.”

There could be problems if two commanders of equal rank wanted the same girl.

“One commander picked me. Then another one came and said, “Why is this girl
here? I have already said that she should be coming to my place, she is to be my
wife.”

So they began fighting over me. Then they decided that the only solution was to
kill me. They sent some boys to get a log and they tied me onto it. They were
discussing this, about killing me and I was crying.

They got angry with me. The first man said, “If you continue with this we will
spear you right away with this bayonet”.

The second commander called for Kony to intervene. Kony said that I should be
released and be sent to his compound.”
“When you first arrive, they put all the girls together. Then they call the officers so they can pick who they want for a wife. Even if you are very young.

I was given to a really big man. You see him in this picture. He was blind on one side. So maybe he didn’t see that I was very young.”

If they had girls left over after all the commanders had made their pick, the operations commander might decide to reward a lower ranking officer by giving him a wife:

“They would look at the lower officers on the battlefield to see how they were fighting. When they brought the girls, a commander might say, “I have been watching this one and he has been responsible. I think he can have a wife now.”

This was the soldier’s choice. While most accepted there were some who would refuse, saying that they wanted to concentrate on their fighting. Girls had no voice, no say in this. As one girl stated, “All girls were given – they didn’t do this courtship.”

Registration
Up until around 1995, both boys and girls were canned 50 – 100 strokes as part of their initiation into the LRA (boys would do the girls first, and then do each other). This was stopped because too many were dying. Instead they had a short registration ceremony:

“All had to be bare-chested – both girls and boys. They put the shear butter across one side of your body and then up and down, then on your forehead and chest. They didn’t say anything when they were doing it.

They said that they were doing this to anoint us as a LRA, that this signifies that you are their people now. This included the young ones, the ting tings as well as the wives and male soldiers.”
**Other Situations**

While the majority of female abductees were taken to southern Sudan, about 5% remained in northern Uganda.

Some commanders, especially those who were skilled fighters, spent the majority of their time in northern Uganda. They were still loyal members of the LRA and were in regular communication with the LRA Command in Sudan.

These commanders, who were head of large battalions, would keep girls in northern Uganda and make them their wives. This was done with Kony’s agreement. The selection process was the same as in southern Sudan, with the high-ranking officers having the first pick.

Girls who stayed in northern Uganda had a particularly difficult time. They received only a short military training – one week or less. Nonetheless, they were expected to travel with the battalions and participate in fighting. Girls who became pregnant would eventually be taken to the Bay (a secure position for resting and medical care) but that might not be until they were four or five months pregnant.
LRA Headquarters,
Southern Sudan
(late 1990s – early 2000s)
LRA Physical Operations & Command Structures

Physical Operations:

The drawing at the beginning of this section shows the LRA Headquarters in southern Sudan. The LRA’s high-ranking commanders stayed in this place, along with their wives, escorts and other functionaries. The area where these commanders lived and worked was called “The Command” reflecting the fact that most of LRA’s strategies were discussed here. The headquarters camp was located near Juba and operated until 2004.

In addition to the headquarters there were always two or three other camps located about 20 or so kilometers away. They were established to ensure that all the LRA soldiers were not together in one location. These camps housed the more active brigades, those that were regularly on missions to northern Uganda. Unlike the Headquarters, these camps were not permanent. For security reasons, they were frequently abandoned and rebuilt in new areas.

Joseph Kony maintained a compound in every camp. He kept wives in each place and regularly moved from one camp to the next. This was to maintain his authority and assess the overall conditions of the troops. Although every brigade as well as the outlying camps had their own commanders, it was important for Kony to remind his soldiers that he was the Over-Ruler.

The outlying camps followed the plan of the headquarters, with a few exceptions. There was only one training ground that was based at the headquarters. While all camps had a health centre, the critically ill or injured were transferred to the headquarters.

The headquarters was designed as a circle. As indicated in the diagram, the brigades were located on the outer perimeter to provide security for The Control. Outside these brigades was another koi or guard patrol keeping watch to see if any enemies were approaching. The sergeants and lance corporals were responsible for patrolling this outer perimeter.

Components of the headquarters, as indicated in the drawing, were:

- **Stores:** These stores housed food, general supplies and military equipment. In those days (late 1990s – early 2000s) the LRA received military supplies from the Sudanese government. The stores were filled to the overflowing with guns (primarily rifles) larger weapons, landmines and ammunition.

- **Operations Room:** The Control met here to plan the LRA’s military operations. As well, the Operations Commander was based here. He was in charge of daily operations.
- **Gardens:** Each commander had a garden that was maintained by his wives and ting tings, with some assistance from boys. The gardens played a vital role as they supplied the LRA’s basic food requirements. Crops included cassava, sweet potatoes, beans, maize and simsim.

- **The Training Ground:** The training ground was located near the second commander’s compound. While the LRA was settled in southern Sudan all new recruits received two weeks of training in marching, gun maintenance, shooting and combat strategies.

- **Medical Centre:** This centre served both The Command and the outlying camps. It was used for those who were seriously sick or injured.

- **The Yard/Prayer Ground:** This area served many purposes. It was also called the Holy Place. Rituals, anointments, large gatherings and prayers for missions were conducted here.

  Most often this space was restricted to The Command who came here to pray and take rituals with Kony. But it was also served other purposes. It was the place where everyone came when Joseph Kony had special announcements to make. Those from the outlying camps would march in to attend these gatherings.

  When there was a difficult situation, Kony would call everyone to The Yard to pray. The only exception would be women who were menstruating – they were not allowed to enter this holy place. All males and females, including the commanders and Joseph Kony, had to remove their shirts/blouses when they entered The Yard. As they entered they were anointed with a special liquid that contained shear oil, the grounded up bones of animals, and a potion something the commanders called “camaplas” and secret substances. This was done to cleanse people’s soul and to keep them holy.

  Troops going out on a mission always received an anointing at The Yard. This anointing was considered to be important to give them courage and protect people from bullets. The ting tings assisted in these ceremonies. While the troops were away the ting tings would pray in The Yard for the success of the mission.

- **Military Centre:** This centre was the place where punishments were enforced. It also included a prison.

- **Signaller:** Communications centre. The LRA Headquarters was in regular contact with all positions.

- **Compounds of Kony, First & Second In Command:** As the diagram indicates the compounds of Kony and his closest commanders were organized so they had easy access to each other.
**Koi:** The koi was the area for the security guards. Every koi had a sergeant, corporal and lance corporal. Their job was to ensure security for The Control and to issue an alarm if an enemy was approaching. The koi included underground areas where the guards could sleep and also be hidden. They were ever on alert and quickly moved into a combat position if attacked. There were several kois. Kony had a koi surrounding his compound as did the first and second commanders. Actually most compounds had some form of koi, even the brigades.

There was also a koi surrounding the whole headquarters.

All commanders had escorts who were responsible for their personal safety. This position held high status, particularly for those who were escorts of the higher commanders. Some of the escorts had officer rank.

Girls were usually not escorts. However, some wives were always be accompanying their husbands. The ones who were senior originals also served, on an informal basis served, as escorts. This was particularly the case when commanders were on missions in northern Uganda. Kony had over 20 escorts.

**Brigades:** Surrounding the command were four brigades. These were commanded by the highest ranking officers whose compounds were located in the centre of each brigade.

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**The Commanders’ Compounds**

All commanders repeated the same plan for their compounds, one that was taken from the leader, Joseph Kony.

Kony’s hut was located in the centre of his compound. Surrounding him were the huts for his wives and ting tings. The first wives occupied the better huts with no more than two wives sharing the same home. The newest wives, along with the ting tings, stayed in a dormitory style hut. Once a wife became pregnant she would be given a better hut and more privacy.

In addition to the huts, there were several other elements. It had its own store. There were two kitchens – one to cook Kony’s food, the other for the wives and children. There was a dining area. There were latrines and washing areas. Kony, of course, had his own private washing and bathing area. Most of the wives would bathe in the water area outside the compound. There was a clothes washing area as well. The gardens were nearby. Children did not have a special space – they were free to move about the compound but were not allowed to leave it, except on special occasions.

The escorts normally lived inside the compounds. The compounds had several layers of security – these were described above.
Command Structures

The LRA was a complex operation with a combination of military and domestic components. Both had their command structures, though Joseph Kony held ultimate decision-making power. In addition to these formal systems there was an informal decision making system at work, one which often involved a cross-over between the military and domestic worlds.

Military:

In the military operations, two command systems were operating.

The formal military system repeated the protocols, command structures and operations found in many professional armed forces. The high-ranking commanders were part of what was called The Command Altar. They regularly met to review situations and decide strategies. They made decisions together which were then passed onto the lesser ranks. Joseph Kony was the General, the commander in chief.

The second system, also led by Joseph Kony, ran parallel to this. Its credibility and source of power was based on his connection to the spiritual world. In practice, this second system held the greater power. For example, if Kony received a communication from the spirits which said that a Command decision was not a good one, it would be stopped.

The Domestic System:

On the domestic level, several command systems were operating. First was the formal power of the commander. He acted as a dictator, requiring that all those inside his compound, particularly the wives, obeyed his every command.

In addition to this system was another, the first wife system. The first wives were recognized as a major force. As the closest wife to the commander husband (if not the favourite one), the first wife held considerable power and influence over the other wives and ting tings living in the compound.

A wife derived her social position from her husband. So, for example, a soldier would have to call a first wife “mama” as a gesture of respect, even if she was younger than him. Kony’s wives enjoyed a high status and expected others to differ to them.
The Formal Military System

The Lord Resistance Army’s military structure was similar to Uganda’s UPDF. Kony said that this would allow them to easily move into operational control of Uganda’s Armed Forces once they had overthrown the Ugandan government. All abductees were considered to be soldiers, members of the Lord’s Resistance Army. Joseph Kony, as the General, made all decisions as to ranks and promotions.

The different ranks were as follows:

First Level:
The Command Altar regularly met to discuss issues and confirm military plans. Members of the Control Altar included heads of different departments plus those in charge of the most powerful brigades. As the undisputed leader, Kony had great power. The Command Altar understood that their role was to realize his vision. However, Kony respected these advisors and often sought their advice. He was close to the field commander with whom he regularly shared his meals. All members of the Command Altar lived inside the LRA headquarters.

Officer ranks in this group:
- General: Joseph Kony
- Major General (One who served as Kony’s closest advisor and second in command)
- Colonels (They were in charge of specific departments or brigades.)
- Lieutenant Colonels (Many held this rank)

Second Level:
Many officers in this group were in charge of the battalions in northern Uganda. They were also responsible for maintaining the LRA’s systems. They provided guidance on all missions and were responsible for the training of new recruits.

Officer ranks in this group:
- Brigadeer
- Major
- Captain
- Lieutenants
- 2nd Lieutenants
**Third Level:**

This third level included many who were active fighters. They also had responsibility for security. While they held power during battles or raiding missions, they were in regular communication with the higher ranking commanders who gave them their orders.

Officers at this level included:

- Sergeant
- Corporal
- Lance Corporal

**Fourth Level: Unranked Soldiers:**

This included the originals and soldiers (both males and females). The originals were divided into two groups: senior originals and originals.

The senior originals (both males and females) enjoyed a considerable status, even though many did not have an official rank. They were known as superior fighters who had totally accepted life in the bush. On the battlefield they produced results and so were not questioned. Commanders could be reluctant to give them direct orders as they were known to easily take offence if not receiving the respect they believed was their due.

Unranked soldiers included:

- Senior originals
- Originals
- “Cruits” – All new abductees were given the label of recruits but it was often shortened to be “cruits”. A person would be called a cruit for a year or so. Then, after they were settled inside the LRA they might be called originals, particularly after a new group of abductees had arrived.
Joseph Kony & the Spirit

According to Joseph Kony and his followers, he had a special connection to the spiritual world. Many believed that he could predict the future and also tell whether a military strategy would be successful.

A secretary/follower was always with Kony to record everything that he said. This was quite a task – Joseph Kony was known to be very talkative. Particularly important was the recording of any communications and messages from the spirit. These messages could occur at any time so the secretary had to always be ready. Because of this special power Kony could override any military decision.

Joseph Kony’s Spiritual World

“According to what I witnessed and heard from the wives there was a specific day when the spirit would come and possess him. The spirit would usually possess him in the night. He would be possessed and the spirit would report to him about what would happen or what he should do.

Then in the morning he would call everyone to come. He would say, “You must not go to the garden but come to the Yard. I have messages from the spirit.” For important announcements the people from the outlying camps would also come.

April 9th was the Day of the Spirit. Everyone would come for that.

Kony would stand in front of the people and the spirit would possess him from there. People would be sitting down; Kony would be standing. It would start at 9 in the morning – 9 exactly the spirit would possess him. Then he would start talking.

There were 14 different spirits. The spirit of a doctor, one for fighting, another for witnessing the future. There were so many. They had different messages and voices. For example, if the spirit who possessed him was a male, he would talk like a man. If the spirit was a female, he would speak like a woman. His voice would keep changing like that. Then there were some spirits who didn’t like to stand - there was a chair ready for that too.

He would tell people what was going to happen and also what people were supposed to do. Like that. Then after all the spirits had all spoken, we would go away and Kony would return to be himself.

This always happened on April 9th but also some other days.”
The Domestic Realm

The Commander’s Power:

As stated above, the commander operated as a dictator in his compound. Except in extreme situations, these men were not reprimanded for their actions, regardless of how cruel or unjustified they were.

The compound was supposed to operate as a kind of home, reflecting the habits of the Acholi culture. But the influence and presence of the military was always there. For example, the wives were expected to salute their husbands. There were different salutes, depending if they were wearing a uniform. Out of uniform a girl would stand stiffly in front of her husband and raise her arm in salute. This was to acknowledge that she had been called into his presence and that he was her commander.

The First Wives’ Power:

The first wife held a pivotal position. Unlike other wives, she had some autonomy and could occasionally assert her will. As the first wife, she maintained an enforcer role and had the ear of the commander husband. Her job was to ensure the smooth running of the compound. In practice, this included both the commander’s and her notion of what “smooth running” entailed.

For most first wives it was important that her power was maintained and that other wives occupied a subservient position. In many ways they copied the habits of their commander husbands by imposing unreasonable demands, being very jealous and orchestrating punishments for those they saw as competitors for their position. While the first wife could not order a punishment, she was in a position to influence the husband. Because of this, the first wife was often feared and hated.

It is true that many first wives mistreated others, particularly the ting tings. But it is important to view this inside the world in which they were operating. It is quite possible that the LRA deliberately encouraged these divisions, as it ensured that the wives did not form alliances. Many girls complain that the husbands knew what was going on but did nothing to stop it. The system required that people mistrusted each other and fought for their own survival, understanding that this would often be at the expense of others.

The Status & Power of Kony Wives:

Kony wives occupied a special category because they had been chosen by the Over-Ruler. Wives of other commanders had to defer to them. For example, if a Kony wife (or even his ting tings) arrived at the water hole, others would have to give way, allowing her to take her water first. Often ting tings of other commanders would fill the jerry can for her. Kony’s first wives would never be found at the water hole – they had almost royalty status. Even high ranking commanders would call Kony wives “mamma” as a gesture of respect.
Cross-Overs: Military and Domestic Spheres

Girls would sometimes receive an officer rank. Senior originals or others who were strong fighters might also be awarded a rank in recognition of this special ability. There were several who received a sergeant ranking. A few had the rank of 2nd Lieutenant. A scattered number of the senior originals rose to the Lieutenant rank, though that was very rare.

Despite the recognition of a girl’s fighting abilities, her status as “wife” was the more defining one. While males received respect due their rank both on and off the battlefield, for girls it was different:

“It is possible that a girl soldier could be given a group who was under her guidance during a battle. For example, in my case, I was a sergeant. When we were out, I was in charge. But back at the headquarters, I wasn’t in charge of anyone. I was a wife.”

The cross-over between the military and domestic spheres was evident in the assigning of ranks to wives. If a wife pleased the husband, he might ask Kony to give her a rank. Kony’s favourite wives were Lieutenants and 2nd Lieutenants. Many of the first wives of the Control Commanders also had this rank. Fatuma, Kony’s first wife until late 2002, was a Captain – the highest rank for any female.

Other Names

In addition to their official names as officers and commanders, men were sometimes given names based on certain characteristics. For example, one commander was called “Acel Calo Apar” which translates to be “ten in one” because he was such an aggressive fighter. Another was called “Ane Ko Mon Ki Koko” which translates to be “He has made many women cry”.

Commanders liked the name “Afende” which is a Swahili name for someone who has a military rank. The LRA commanders believed that Swahili was the language for warriors.

The commander husbands liked their wives to call them “Lapwony” which roughly translates to mean “teacher”. Kony’s name was “Lapwony Mait” which means Head Teacher. At times they would say that this word should be used for all the males inside the Lord’s Resistance Army – that they were all teachers. Of course, this did not apply to females.
On Being a LRA Wife:

Roles, Responsibilities & Violations

The LRA structures assumed that males would fill the most important functions. The overall approach was to assert male superiority - a belief that was used to justify the exploitation and cruelty of females.

This was a carefully orchestrated system, one where females performed a huge range of roles and services. A wife was expected to provide sexual, reproductive, combat and productive services. She was also used as a “whipping boy” for the commanders to assert their egos and vent their rage and cruelty. Without the wives, the LRA would not have been able to exist.

Physical Space:

Shortly after a girl was selected, she was escorted by an armed guard to her commander’s compound. Surrounding every compound were male guards who monitored all those entering and leaving. A new wife was greeted by the first wife, shown her sleeping quarters and told her basic duties.

A new wife quickly realized that this compound defined her life and the limits of her freedom. Anytime she went outside this area she would be accompanied by an armed guard, even while conducting routine chores such as garden work, gathering firewood or collecting water.

Social Space:

The LRA held a deep distrust of females. Joseph Kony was known for saying the females were great planners and if left to their own devices would surely organize an escape. Casual conversations with others were looked on with great suspicion. Wives were not allowed to move from one compound to another, with the exception of the first wives. Friendliness with male escorts/guards was seen as an act of insubordination at best, a betrayal at worst:

“You were not allowed to speak to other men. They said that if you began to talk freely, the temptation might come, that the man might start using love words to you. And you had already been given to another man.

When I first arrived, I remember that there were two people – a boy and girl. They had known each other from home, so they would sometimes speak to each other and laugh – they had been friends in their village. So they tied them to a big tree and killed both of them. This made everyone o fearful. So you would only greet others, especially boys. You did not speak to each other.”
Inside a commander’s compound, a girl’s position was defined by three factors:

**Date of Arrival:** A first wife was exactly that – the first girl to have been given to a particular commander. In each compound, a wife would be aware of her “number”. The wives, not the commanders created this system as a way of formally defining the power relationships amongst the females.

**Age:** According to LRA doctrine, a female was not supposed to be used sexually until she had started to menstruate. Younger girls (known as ting tings) were kept in the compound, working as assistants and being groomed as future wives. They were often badly treated by the other wives, particularly the first wives.

**Appearance:** Commanders were known to have favourites. This could be because of a girl’s looks, skin tone or body. At certain times students were highly appreciated. Commanders would often taunt the other wives, saying that one of them was his only love, his princess.

Widows presented a problem. Many commanders died on the battlefront. Wives of these men were divided amongst the high-ranking commanders, both to maintain the system and to give these girls protection. The wives would be more or less evenly distributed amongst the commanders. A general rule was that a widow’s next husband would have a lower rank than her previous one.
Sexual Violence

The LRA’s attitudes and practices on sex were closely linked to their military structures. Only the upper ranks, those who had proven themselves on the battlefield, were allowed to have a wife. And a wife meant sexual activity – sex was not supposed to happen outside the husband/wife structure.

There was a clear link between sex and military abilities – the second had to be proven before the first was possible. In addition to being given a rank for good abilities and performance on the battlefield, LRA commanders were also rewarded with a wife.

According to the female returnees, the LRA command considered this a morality issue. They believe that unranked soldiers could not be trusted with this power. Instead they had to earn it and prove that they were responsible enough to have a wife.

For the LRA, sexual activity was connected to violence. It focused only on male needs. While girls had the name “wife” they had none of the rights normally associated with this word. In describing these situations, female returnees speak of how they were “used” – this is an apt description for how they were treated by these men. The LRA was well known for its cruelty and atrocities against the Acholi civilian population. These men repeated their habits on the battlefield inside their huts as they called a wife to be with him.

First Times

Girls describe their fear the first time they were sexually violated:

“I felt so frightened and scared because I knew what was about to happen. I was only 12 years old. I had no experience of sex and I knew that I was about to be forced to have sex with Otti Lagony. Of all the commanders, he was known to be the most ruthless and fiercest of all.

He ordered me to come and sleep with him. At first I refused. Then he drew his pistol and pointed it at me. He told me to lie down. As helpless as I was I did everything as he ordered me because I had to choose between my life and losing my virginity. I choose my life… I cried and bled the whole night.”

Others describe threats and coercion:

“My husband was always eager to kill. He said, “You are going to come to my bed.” I refused. I went to sleep in another place. So he sent someone to get me. I still refused. Then he came with a knife. And he hit me four times. It really hurt. So I went to his place. He said, “If you continue to refuse, I am going to beat you until you die.” So I didn’t refuse anymore.”
Joseph Kony had a particular pattern:

“The one I know best is Kony’s system, as I was one of his wives. For him, when he had first brought you, he would be watching you for maybe one or two months. Maybe he admires you. So, one day, he thinks, “I want to use that lady.” So around eight he will call for you.

In my case he said, “You bring for me some water.” For you, you might think it is just water. You will get the water and bring it to him.

Then he said, “Now, you should not go back, because now you are my wife.” If you try to deny, maybe say, “For me, no, I don’t want” he will immediately call for an escort to come with a stick to cane you.

You will stay the whole night. You will get up and leave around 6 in the morning. The following day things will go along normally.

Every night he changed who he called. This was so he didn’t tire of them as he could always have a new one. There was always someone, every night, even when he was sick. Some people might say that Kony was kind to his wives. But this, this was not kind.”

**Codes of Conduct and Violations of Younger Girls**

There seemed to be only one rule – girls could not be used until they had started to menstruate. The LRA were sure that all girls would begin their period when they were 11 – 12 years old. This is perhaps why this age group was the most desired in terms of abductions.

While this was the rule, it was often disobeyed, particularly after the ting tings no longer participated in spiritual rituals. Even Joseph Kony, who, along with his command, had established this rule, was known to take a girl at an early age:

“Kony liked ting tings so much. Most of his wives would have been taken when they were young - they had grown up inside his camp. Every time they came from northern Uganda with new ones, Kony would pick about five young ones so that they could grow up inside his camp and then be his wives.

When he sees that you are getting beautiful, he will start using you before you have reached a certain age. But if you don’t bathe and you are not so careful with your appearance, he would not be interested until you have grown up and have started your menstruation. That is when he would start calling you.”
They took the new girls to the open place and began to distribute them. But the commander who had brought us hid two of us because he was afraid that he would lose us in the distribution process to other, more powerful commanders. His intention was that we would become his wives. He kept us in the hut. We were only allowed out in the night so others could not see us.

After two weeks he called the first wife and told her, “You go and tell this girl [me] that today I want her to learn how to be a wife, how we do things here.”

So she came to me and starting telling me, “Today Lapwony wants you to go and sleep in his hut. And then after that, tomorrow you get water and take the water for bathing and then you bathe yourself. Then you must immediately go to the kitchen and begin to cook breakfast for him. If you refuse they are going to cane you seriously.”

When he called for me at around 8 in the evening they couldn’t find me because I was hiding. She went back and told him this. He said, “You must find her.” So they were all looking for me. They found me in a little hut that no one was using. They asked me what I was doing, that Lapwony was waiting for me. I said that I wouldn’t go. When I refused the first wife started pinching me and hitting me with a stick.

So I went. When I arrived at his hut, Lapwony asked me, “Have you ever seen anyone that I have killed?” I said, “No” He replied, “If you don’t lie down then I will kill you.” I just stood there. Then he got a gun and said, “I am going to shoot you.” I said, “Okay, you can kill me.” He stood there for a moment and then told me to get out.

After three days he commanded the first wife and two ting tings to bring me. When I refused they began slapping me and hitting me with sticks, saying that I had no choice, that I had to go. The first wife went back to him and said that I wouldn’t come. He became very angry and chased away all his wives, telling them to go to sleep in the Koi that night. All but me.

The wives started to leave. I tried to follow them but he sent three boys to get me. When I was in front of him he said, “Are you a witch?” I said, “No, I am not.” He said, “Then from this day onwards you must do whatever I tell you to do.” He commanded me to go into his hut. At first I refused but then I had to because he had ordered the boys to get sticks to cane me. That night he used me seriously.”
The LRA’s Fear of Female Sexuality

The LRA had extreme beliefs and fears of female sexuality. They maintained that it was a force that had to be contained and controlled. These attitudes were displayed in their views on menstruation, their jealousy and their assumptions about female’s need for sex.

Menstruation

- Girls who were menstruating were considered to be unclean and dangerous. Many measures were established to ensure that they could not taint or harm men:
  - All girls who were menstruating had to be separated from the rest of the population. In Sudan, if a woman was menstruating, her hut had to be isolated – no man could enter it. In northern Uganda they would be kept separate from others, resting under a tree, if one was available. They also had to use special cups and basins.
  - Menstruating girls were not allowed to fight, work in the garden or cook.
  - Girls who were menstruating were not allowed to greet men. At times, the LRA also forbid them to greet other women, fearing that this woman might pass on the unclean power to a commander if she met him shortly after receiving a greeting from a menstruating woman.
  - Menstruating girls could cook, but only for themselves. Others would never cook with these pots. If someone gave them cooked food, great care was taken to ensure that her plate and that of the cooking pot (which would contain food for others) did not touch.
  - If a girl who was menstruating needed water, she would go to the source and stand some distance from it, not touching the water. Others would get the water for her and pour it into her jerry can, being careful not to touch her can.
  - A woman who was menstruating was not supposed to touch children.
  - When the LRA were moving in a convoy, anyone who was menstruating wore a white cloth on her hand so that men could avoid touching this person.

Often several women would be having their period at the same time. They would stay together so many welcomed this time as a release from the usual situation.

According to returnees many females stopped having their periods while they were living in captivity. This was both because of the physical harshness of the life and because of the constant stress they lived inside. But wives would often pretend that they were having their periods, even when they were not.
Control & Jealousy

The commanders were notoriously jealous. The LRA maintained that females had a strong need for sex and would take up with other men if the commanders did not satisfy and control them. They constantly monitored girls' behaviour for any signs of disloyalty:

“My commander would scream at me, “Who do you think you are? Women are dying for me; everyone wants to have sex with me! I am going to beat you seriously; you need to be a good wife to me.”

“You were not allowed to talk to other boys. For example, if you were going to fetch water, an escort was supposed to take you to the river. You could be severely punished for delaying getting water as they would suspect you were up to something.”

“Kony was very, very jealous. He could even kill you if he suspected you. I remember one lady that used to talk a lot to an escort. When Kony realized that they liked each other, he called the other escorts and had them take them into the bush and kill them.”

Perversity

According to the returnees, most of the commanders had huge but insecure egos. With this came the need the need to control their wives. The satisfaction of these needs frequently degenerated into violence, particularly if a girl showed any opposition. There were times when the behavior was extreme, even by LRA standards. As female returnees noted, many of the commander were crazy, so it was hard to predict what they would do or require of them.

“One night that man decided to call the ting tings. There were two of us at the time. He called us into his hut; he had a wife there with him. He said, “You must dance for me, my wife wants to enjoy watching you dance”

We said that we didn’t know how to dance. He said, “You must.” But we just couldn’t do it, we were too scared. So he said, “Okay, then you must sit there and watch us.” So we had to be there when while the two of them started having sex. He said that this was for our education, so we could learn how to do it properly.

We were feeling very ashamed. It went on and on all night. Finally we fell asleep. Then we found that he was hitting us on the head for this, so angry with us. And he said, “These are useless, hopeless girls.”
Attachments

While it was the exception, some wives developed a measure of love and attachment to their husbands. One returnee explained it this way:

“I was in Otti’s house almost four years, until he was killed in 1999. [Kony believed that Otti, his second in command, was plotting against him so he had him assassinated.]

In a strange way his death was hard for me. I had come to have some feelings for him, to be dependent on him. They say that when the right person to love is not there you come to accept what you are given. I had come to like him, partly because being with him gave me protection. Because I was his wife I had to be treated with respect and given fair treatment by the other commanders.”

These feelings of loyalty to the husband were particularly strong with the first wives:

“Many first wives wanted to have the same kind of situation as if they were living at home. They would like to think that as the first wife, “he loves me differently; I am in a different category.” New people would challenge this dream.”

“When a new wife came, the originals would become jealous. This was because they feared that the commander’s attention would focus only on her. The first wives and originals felt that they owned the husband so they resented this new person who was coming to take their husband.”

While they might have wanted a traditional husband-wife relationship with the commander, most understood that this was impossible. Instead they would try to be a kind of broker between the commander and his wives, particularly in regards to sexual activity:

“That man ordered me to go to his hut every night. When I would come out in the morning, the first wife would pinch me and say things to me. She said that I didn’t know how to play sex, that only she knew the styles that he liked.

She would say that I should refuse to go. I was very young. I didn’t know what to do because I feared to die. So I decided instead just to lie there calmly and let him do everything that he wanted to do to me.”

Returnees spoke of wives who had the power to decide who would go to the commander’s hut in the evening. Some commanders, in deference to the power of their first wives, might give them favours to
“pave the way” so that he could use a new girl without this causing trouble inside the compound. Others would enjoy these struggles and play into a first wife’s insecurities.

“I was the first wife. It was really hard for me. Because he brought in a new person and he called her his sweetheart. He was always calling her at night. And me, he was seeing me as some sort of useless person. I had taken long in the bush. So I was old for him, not like the other one. She was new and fresh.”

Acts of Resistance

Despite the consequences, many wives tried to find ways to avoid being used by the commanders. In fact, almost all the stories begin with how they tried to refuse, particularly the first time that they were used by their husbands:

I told him, “I will never love you. If you want me to be your wife, you must go to my parents, and you should do it the proper way. ” He said, “That is the first time I have ever heard that – you are so stubborn.” He just laughed, it didn’t change how he was but it made me feel good that I said this.”

Girls gave different reasons for their acts of resistance. Some just couldn’t stand having sex with the husband - they hated him so much. Others said that having sex with him, just didn’t feel right, it was against everything they had been taught by their parents. Still others feared the jealousy of the first wives. Many agreed when one person said, “Every time I just wouldn’t feel well afterwards.”

“One time, I just could not bear to go to him. I refused, saying that he should continue with another one. So he did that – he called another. But she also refused.

He said, “Now all of you are refusing, so there will be no eating of my food. You must stand.”

We had to stand the whole night and then for two more days. We were not allowed to sleep, squat or even to lean against the wall. They poured water on us so that we would feel the cold. While we were standing like that, he made us watch him having sex with another girl. He said, “Maybe now that you are so cold and you are watching me having sex with another girl, it will make you want to do it, so that you can be warm again.” But it didn’t.”

Girls used different tactics. Some, as in the story above, outright refused. In the following story, a 10 year old girl, sought the support of the operations commander:
“When I had reached 10 years, I overheard the commander say, “Today I am going to open a new ‘cavena’ [slang for plastic bag]. I didn’t know what it meant but one of the other wives who was there understood.

We talked behind the hut and she asked me if I had started my period. When I told her no, she said that she couldn’t understand it, that she knew from what he said that this is what he was planning. That day I didn’t eat anything.

At around 4 in the afternoon he called for me. I went. He picked up four bed sheets and put them on the bed. He told me, “Today you are going to sleep here.” He was going out and said that when he returned he expected me to be there. I said, “No, I am not going to sleep there.” I tried to make it like a joke.

That night I ran out of the compound and went to the operational headquarters. They asked me what I was doing there, what was going on. When I explained, they told me to stay there with them. The next day they asked him and he denied it. But I stood up to him and told everything to the operational commander. He took my side and told him that he should leave me alone, that I was too young.

But as soon as they had left, he called me to his hut and starting canning me with a wire lock. He was so angry, shouting, “Why have you reported me?” He commanded me to get food from the kitchen. I went very fast and then ran back to the operational headquarters. They transferred me to another place.”

Others tried the indirect route. They would pretend that their period was prolonged. This could be tricky as the commanders would send the originals to check. Younger girls would try to hide the fact that they had started their menstruation.

These stories usually had horrible endings as girls were sorely punished for any refusals or resistance. And the girls would know this – which only makes these acts of resistance more courageous.
Producing: Forced Pregnancy

Joseph Kony’s vision included the creation of a new generation. He complained that the old population was no longer supporting him, even though he was fighting for their rights. So these “old people” should be killed. The ones remaining would form the basis for a new clan.

This translated into considerable pressure for wives to become pregnant. In fact, an informal competition amongst the high-ranking commander existed as to whose wives became pregnant and produced the most children.

The International Criminal Court defines “forced pregnancy” as a violation of international humanitarian law. The act of forced pregnancy includes three critical components:

- The circumstances of conception
- The confinement of pregnant women; and
- The element of intent.

Circumstances of Conception:

Getting Pregnant:

- According to returnees they were repeatedly “called” by these men shortly after their period had ended:
  
  “After your period, that would be when they really wanted you. They would be using you for several days then. They believed that you were most likely to get pregnant just after your period ended.”
  
  “A lot of the commanders would go around and ask girls when they had their period. They would make a note of this. If you refused when they called you, saying that you still had your period, they would send one of the originals around to check.”

- Girls who did not get pregnant would be punished and given hard labour. The commanders would claim that they (the wives) were trying to prevent a pregnancy.

- Once a girl became pregnant the commander would usually stop calling her for sex. Female returnees joked that many hoped to get pregnant, so they would no longer be used by these men.
Being Pregnant

“For my case, I got pregnant twice. The first time I didn’t tell anyone. The first month went and the second month. But I was being sick so they knew that I was pregnant.

Kony asked if I was sick, but he always knew from the first wives who was pregnant. Once he found out that I was pregnant, he was no longer calling me. This was the pattern – so many were hoping that they would get pregnant.

If you are pregnant the husbands don’t call you. Also if you are breastfeeding - only when the child has started walking and isn’t breastfeeding, then they will start calling you again.”

Confinement & Birth:

Once a girl became pregnant her freedom of movement was even more restricted. In practice, this meant that pregnant girls did not leave the compound:

“They keep you in the compound and they didn’t want you to do any work. They told me that I shouldn’t work in the garden. Once you are pregnant you cannot go out for fighting, you are supposed to concentrate only on producing this child for them.

So being pregnant was important because they would favour you somehow.”

There was no formal training or midwives to help in delivery. It was just your friends who would be with you. Just before someone was delivering Fatuma would put much care and she would help you, bathe you and do everything for you. But after the baby, it would be - enough is enough - and she would not be kind anymore.

“Kony would come and enter your hut to see the baby. He might even carry the baby around. He liked babies so much. He favoured girls more than boys. He liked my first girl a lot. But when he saw the second girl he liked her even more. He said that she resembled him so much and that made him very, very happy.

When I was there, there were 62 children of his. But after I left [2004] he added many more children.”
Those unable to get pregnant were considered inferior:

“Say if you are first wife but you have not produced. Then they bring another wife and she produces. Even though you are the first wife, you have to go looting all the time. And you have to bring everything for the one who is pregnant. The originals without children and the non-originals are always knocking each other because of this – the competition, the need to have a child because of the status you get and the favoured position.”

The competition to produce children was strong amongst the high ranking commanders. For example, one commander, who was suspected to be sterile, accepted a wife’s pregnancy as his own, even though there was a strong rumour that the father was a guard. Normally, even the suspicion of such disloyalty would be punished with death, but in this case the commander was so eager to prove he could produce children, he chose to ignore the circumstances.

Returnees remembered one girl who was determined not to get pregnant, regardless of the consequences:

“There was an Aboke girl who did not want to get pregnant. Her commander knew this and it made him so angry. He used to beat her and use her so roughly, with many insults. He would say, “I am going to use you so much that you are going to have twins.”

She finally got pregnant. They were watching her so closely, everything that she did. She wasn’t even allowed hot tea as they feared it would cause a miscarriage.”

**Intention:**

Joseph Kony repeatedly spoke of the need for “multiplying”. At one point he went so far as to order that every LRA wife must produce 15 children. His dearest wish was to create a new clan, one that was made up of children who had been abducted as well as those born in captivity. He created various names for his new clan: Lala (Our Saviour); Rubanga (God is Good); and Bin Rwot (Come Lord).

In 1992 the LRA upper command was worried because the wives were not “producing” – few were getting pregnant. So a special anointing ceremony was held to purify them and to improve the chances that they would be able to produce babies.
Physical Work:

The wives were responsible for all the functions that kept the LRA compounds and headquarters going. They were responsible for the extensive gardens, care of the compound, cooking, childcare, water supplies, hut maintenance, firewood and laundry. This was a lot of work conducted inside difficult circumstances – southern Sudan is notoriously hot.

Duties were assigned according to a wife’s status and position. First wives and the originals operated more as managers than workers. Pregnant girls and new mothers were often relieved of the heavier work. The newly arrived, the ting tings and those who were not pregnant were responsible for the most of the duties.

Food Procurement:

Food procurement was a major issue for the LRA. Its headquarters in southern Sudan was a huge operation, requiring food for thousands. The two main ways to obtain food were through gardens and looting of Dinka villages. Wives were expected to participate in both.

- **Gardening**

  Every commander had gardens of staple crops including cassava, simsim, millet, sorghum and sweet potatoes. Wives were primarily responsible for all the activities: planting, weeding and harvesting. Upper commanders often had chickens – the wives also took care of them.

  During the planting season, things were hectic as there was so much work to be done. This time was particularly difficult for the wives of lower commanders as they would be taken to assist in the fields of the higher ranks. This meant that they had fewer opportunities to tend their own gardens, but had to make sure the planting was done as survival depended on it.

  Kony’s garden was a special situation. Wives in all the brigades would be commanded to come and work his fields. The first, second and third wives of higher commanders often didn’t participate in fieldwork – they left this to the other wives and the ting tings.

- **Collecting Water & Firewood**

  These jobs were usually performed by ting tings and wives who were not mothers.

- **Looting**

  Raiding missions in southern Sudan were a regular activity. Through these missions the LRA would obtain chickens, goats, cooking oil, various other food stuffs and materials such as clothing, cooking implements and batteries. The commanders of these missions would bring back special gifts for their first and favourite wives.
Mothers and wives who were pregnant were the only ones excused from these duties. The commanders would identify those who had to go out. These squads usually went for a week at a time, often travelling long distances.

All those taking part in raiding missions were given a gun. The Dinkas had learned to arm themselves against these attacks and were ready to do battle. These were tough and dangerous assignments:

“When we went for raiding, at times there was no water. It reached the level some times that we were fighting for each others’ urine. Often there was no food on the way to the place where we had to go to raid. So many people died.”

When the Uganda Government launched Operation Iron Fist in 2002 the LRA had to flee to the mountain region. This was an inhospitable area - food and water sources were scarce. There was a lot of hunger, and desperate actions to obtain food. The main target for these raiding missions was the Sudan Army barracks. Girls played a key role in these actions, ones that caused many deaths.

**Food Preparation:**

The LRA understood cooking to be an important wifely duty. For example, the rituals first time a girl was used by her husband she had to make his breakfast the following morning.

Kony enjoyed white meat, greens and pigeon. His children liked greens – they rarely ate meat. He had his own kitchen where the wives cooked for him and his children:

“He would say, “This week, so and so will cook for me.” For the wives who were cooking for other wives, it would also be rotated.

Kony liked to eat with other commanders. It was always three. They would share. When I was there, he often ate with Otti and Matata. They would be gathering in a shady place. The wives who were in the kitchen would serve.

The children would be eating separately but at the same time. The wives would also eat separately. You would eat according to the group you were in – the first wives, the second/middle wives (with children), the new wives and the ting tings.”

A properly cooked meal was an indication of a wife’s loyalty and devotion to her husband. Satisfying these requirements was no easy matter – commanders often changed their criteria from one day to the next. A meal praised on Monday could be denounced as inadequately cooked on Tuesday. This came with harsh criticism and punishment:
“I was young and didn’t know how to cook yet so the vegetables weren’t completely done.

He said that I had spoiled the cooking and I had to eat all the food – not just for him but for everyone in the compound. It got to the point that I just couldn’t eat anymore. Then he gave me a five litre jerry can filled with water and said that I had to drink it all.

It got so I just couldn’t put any more water in my mouth. But the commander was still angry. He told his escort to get sticks and cane me. He started kicking me, saying, “You know, I can kill you so easily.” Just for bad cooking.”

The commanders often issued impossible orders. For example, a husband might suddenly arrive and demand that his dinner be given him immediately, all the while screaming that his wives didn’t treat him with proper respect:

“It was my turn to cook. But he sent us to go and gather grass for making a hut. We were instructed to cut enough grass for two huts. We worked all day and tied the grass and carried it back. We were a bit late returning.

When he arrived and found that I had not cooked, he demanded to know why not. When I explained that it was because I was busy filling his command to get the grass, he became very angry. He said, “Well, now I want food so you must prepare it for me right away.”

There was no water and water was far away. So I started cooking as best I could. He started canning me.

Then he grabbed me and used me. He used all kinds of abusive language against me. He said, “I know what you want, you want to go back to Uganda so that the government soldiers can use you. Well I am going to use you first.”

So it happened like that - this was my first time with him.”

Commanders often shared meals together. The wives cooking that week would bring the food to the place where they had gathered. There was a rivalry amongst the men to see who had the best meal. If a commander’s food was considered inferior he would be extremely angry with his wife, claiming that she had deliberately humiliated him in front of others:

“The big commanders ate together – maybe four or six together. If your food was not tasty, they would leave it and call you in. They would direct you to sit there. Then they would tell you, “Okay, you
eat that food now.” Maybe you have put too much salt or you did not stir it well or maybe it was not done on time.

Then when you had finished eating – and you must eat it all – they would tell you to lie down. Then they would beat you seriously, screaming at you, “Why did you cook bad food?”

The saucepan was seen as an important symbol of a LRA wife’s role as cook and supporter of her husband. She was expected to take great care of it. When travelling, girls would carry the saucepan on their heads, along with the other cooking supplies. To leave it behind or lose it was unthinkable.

**Laundry:**

The wives maintained clothes for the commander, themselves and their children. Keeping the commander’s clothing in top-notch condition was a major responsibility. Any failures in this work received a harsh punishment, as illustrated in this story:

“One day he told me to go and wash his uniform. When I reached the water hole, there was an Arab man there. He was crazy and started shooting his gun at me. So I ran away and wasn’t able to wash the uniform.

Then later he [the husband] came later and asked me why I hadn’t cleaned his uniform. When I explained, he became very angry and said, “Armies don’t run away, they shoot back.” But I didn’t have a gun. When I said that he became even angrier.

He ordered me to bring 10 jerry cans [10 litres] of water and also the uniform. I was thinking that he wanted to supervise me washing the uniform. But instead he said, “You must drink all this water.”

So I started drinking. I drank as much as I could – it started coming out my nose. I stopped. When he saw that, he started beating me with his gun, saying I wasn’t following his order. He even opened his gun as if he was going to shoot me.

So finally I said, “If this is my day of death, then I think you maybe have to kill me, because this is too much for me.” So he decided to stop, though he continued to beat me.

And after that he was always finding ways to mistreat me.”
Child Care:

Once a wife became pregnant her status and work duties changed significantly. A mother had fewer chores and was usually not expected to go out looting or fighting. Her job was to stay on the compound and care for the commander’s children. Most were given a ting ting to help with childcare.

It was understood that these children belonged first to them, the LRA commanders. The mothers’ job was to look after the children for them:

“...They thought that they were their children, that they belonged to them. You had to do everything for that child. But you couldn’t keep it like it was yours. You were not supposed to punish them. Kony did not like to see you hit a child, regardless of what he had done.

Kony used to say that wives should care for all of his children equally. If, for example, I left my child with another Kony wife, she would have to be just as caring of that child as her own.”

This is partly an Acholi tradition with its collective sense of childcare, where all adults in a village keep a watchful eye over the children. However, the LRA Command twisted this tradition, making it serve their agenda to produce a “new clan.”

The LRA Nursery School

Over the years, the LRA Headquarters came to have many children. As they were growing up and becoming older, the Command decided that they needed formal education. In 1999 Kony announced that a nursery school would be established at the LRA Headquarters. This was created for two main reasons:

- As part of his vision, Joseph Kony wanted all his children to be learned so they could be part of his new generation.

- The high ranking commanders were concerned that the Aboke girls had not settled well inside the LRA structure. They believed that work as teachers would help with this.
## The LRA School Named Rubanga Tek (God is Great)

**Dates:** 1999 – 2002

### Location:
The school was housed inside the Control area, just next to Kony’s compound. It was given a big space with four classrooms in a nice setting (on the crest of a small hill). The school was well supplied with benches, blackboards, a register book, books, pens, pencils and notebooks.

### Teachers:
There were seven teachers in the school – all females. The Head Teacher/Principal was a man who was professionally trained. It was a point of pride for commanders to have wives who were teachers. But they forbid them to speak to each other, saying that this would result in plots to escape.

### Uniform:
Both teachers and students wore uniforms. For the students this was a dark blue shirt with a white collar and belt. Teachers' dresses were made of silk with a design of pink and red flowers.

### Students:
The school was available to all children at the LRA Headquarters, those aged four years and up. The only requirement was good behaviour. Approximately 100 students were at the school, both boys and girls.

### Program:
The program included Kindergarten One and Two and Primary One. Subjects were: Math, English, Science and Writing.

The school was very popular with the children. According to some of the teachers, they greatly enjoyed learning and making new friends outside their compounds.

### What happened to the school and teachers?

The teachers enjoyed a slightly privileged position, something that provoked jealousy amongst the first wives. Eventually, this erupted into a major issue and there was a plot against them, organized by Kony’s first wives. Five received a severe canning and were so wounded they almost died. (See story on the next page)

After that, the school remained vacant. The five teachers who were beaten refused to continue working at the school. The school was closed.
The End of The School (August 2002)

Fatuma had not liked me, particularly because Kony had favoured me somehow. She said that I was encouraging the others to escape. Several commanders came. They said that the spirit had sent a message to Kony. They said that the spirit had revealed what we were planning and that we should be careful.

So I said to them, “Well your spirit is a liar because we are not planning anything. So I don’t think it is really a spirit.” I think that might have been one reason why they decided to cane us, because I defied them.

Another teacher was also angry and said, “If you people are going to be like this, then we will stop teaching.” They said, “No we don’t want that. We just want you to know that we have heard about your plan and we are watching you.”

During that night, a big commander lost several of his male soldiers. Three of them escaped, one of them was his favourite escort. He was very upset. One of his wives was also a teacher. He was looking for revenge. He came at five in the morning to tell Kony that his escort had escaped. Kony began to think that this plan about the teachers escaping was true. He said that we had planned it with these boys. Kony commanded that the teachers should be taken to the military to be caned seriously, saying, “If it causes them to die, then they should die.”

In the morning the escorts were calling us. They told us that we had to go to the military centre. We went without knowing anything. We sat there and waited. The soldiers were quiet, just talking on the walkie-talkie to Kony. We heard him say that we should be canned 300 times.

They brought 20 energetic boys. They told us to lie down. There were two boys for each person. They brought piles of sticks. The commander said, “Ok, you take these sticks and begin canning these girls.” We did not have to take our clothes off.

They started canning us - 50 strokes – but it was really 100 because both boys would hit us at the same time, they called that one. They asked us, “Is it true that you wanted to escape?” We said, “No”. We said, “No.” Then they said, “Oh you people, you are denying but it is true. You must lie down again.”

They began canning us again. After a while they could see that we were completely hopeless, that we couldn’t even turn. They said, “These people are going to die if we finish the 300.” So they stopped at 200. We couldn’t even stand up, they had to pick us up and carry us to a grass hut. We didn’t know anything. It took us a month to recover.”
Combat Duties

Both male and female abductees were understood to be soldiers of the Lord’s Resistance Army. This is reflected in Joseph Kony’s welcoming address to the new abductees, calling them “one of us”. It was also demonstrated in the LRA’s great anger at those who tried to escape or were rescued by the Uganda Armed Forces. This was considered to be treason, an act punishable by death or severe beating.

Training:

All abductees in southern Sudan received two-weeks of training in: 1) Marching 2) Weapons Assembly and 3) Target Practice

Boys and girls were mixed together as the basic training was the same for both. However, boys who showed good potential as soldiers would be identified during these sessions and later given specialized training in handling bigger weapons and bombs. There was no formal testing at the end of the training.

- **Marching:**

  “The first training was mostly about how to march. Two or three days of it: How to march in a line, how to turn, how to salute. At first girls and boys marched together. Then they separated us to see which group marched better.”

- **Weapons Assembly & Cleaning:**

  “They brought guns. They showed everyone how to clean them, break them into parts and reassemble them. Then they ordered us to try it.

  You immediately start fixing it, as fast as you could. If you were slow, you had to keep practicing. They waited until everyone was at the same level.

  If you were a low learner, they could cane you. For those who showed talent with this, they might be trained in other guns, such as a machine gun.”

- **Target Practice:**

  “Next there was the training on how to shoot and to hit a target. They put a chart with a black circle on a tree. Your job was to hit that circle. They took you one by one. Most people had a hard time with it. The gun was heavy and you had to lie down on the ground to do it. For the girls this was difficult. For the young ones, the gun was often too heavy. Afterwards, in the fighting, they did not give them a gun until they were more mature, those over 12 years.”
• **Combat Strategies:**

“After you had learned to hit a target, they taught you how to run with a gun and to dodge your enemy. We practiced this so much, so that we could learn how to fight in the field.”

**Note:** This was the training for those who went to southern Sudan. For those who were kept in northern Uganda, the training was shorter and informal. It usually was less than a week and only included basic instructions on gun maintenance, shooting and combat strategies. Those staying in northern Uganda would almost immediately in combat situations.

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**A LRA Soldier’s Equipment:**

- **Guns:** The LRA believed that all soldiers must have a gun. So, depending on supplies, all male and female recruits received a gun at the end of their training. If supplies were short, the boys had preference as it assumed that they were the strongest fighters.

When the LRA gave the new recruits their guns, they said, “This is to protect you.” Those who had recently completed their training often feared guns, so there was time given for them to become accustomed to carrying a weapon.

LRA soldiers had to have their guns with them at all times. Those who did not were punished. For example, when females went to fetch water they carried their guns with them. At the same time they were closely watched by an armed guard. So one person had a gun for personal protection while the other had a gun to shoot that person.

In northern Uganda girls carried guns as they marched. This was the sign of a true soldier. But as wives they were also expected to carry a saucepan and cooking implements. This made for a heavy load, particularly when travelling through the bush or when running away from the enemy. Many girls just couldn’t manage both. The commander would intervene, taking the gun away from them:

> “Some girls could not carry both the luggage and a gun at the same time. The commanders would become very angry and abuse them, accusing them of being weak. They would say, “You are not a good soldier.”

Then they would take away the gun, as a kind of punishment. They would leave the girl with the luggage to carry and no way to protect herself.”
- **Uniforms:** Uniforms were much needed. They provided protection against the high grasses, hot sun and the physical demands of a battle. Unfortunately, there were not usually enough uniforms for everyone. The LRA established the following criteria for their distribution:
  
  - Uniforms were usually available for those who were fighting.
  
  - Priority was given to the male soldiers. Often females who had uniforms would be told to remove them and give them to a favoured male escort or new recruit.
  
  - Girls could wear civilian trousers if there were not enough uniforms.
  
  - Northern Uganda’s high grasses ripped trousers so there was a constant demand for new uniforms. But the supply was limited. Preference was given to the originals and ranking officers. LRA soldiers often used the trousers of civilians who had been killed in village attacks or those of the UPDF who had died in battles.
  
  - Husbands would give uniforms as a gift to their favourite wives.
  
  - Wives of the high-ranking commanders received uniforms when they were moving with them.

- **Other Weapons:**

  In addition to rifles the LRA had many other weapons: machine guns, grenades, rocket launchers, bombs and landmines. Girls were not usually trained in these weapons nor were they allowed to use them. However, there were exceptions, particularly amongst the female senior originals:

  “I remember one girl, she was an original and she used to be so skilled in handling a machine gun. She carried it over her shoulder when she was moving. She used to fight with the male soldiers and they knew she had good ability with it.”
Combat Roles of Girls and Women

1. Services For the Sudan Government:
Until 2002 Sudan allowed the LRA to be based in their country. In return the rebels often provided soldiers to the Sudan Government in their war with the SPLA:

“They usually requested boys. They provided everything: – food, uniforms, and guns. We did not fight with them. They picked a place where only the LRA would go. It usually was very dangerous. Many were killed with this.”

What did the girls do?

“The girls mostly had the job of carrying the bullets to the soldiers when they ran out. They would carry tins filled with bullets on their head. Some girls lost their hair because of the heat and also the weight.”

2. Missions to Northern Uganda
There were always missions going to northern Uganda. These battalions would be attacking villages, abducting children and also engaged in battles with the UPDF. Some of the battalions were practically settled there, with the commanders only returning to the Sudan camp occasionally to report.

The majority of recruits sent to northern Uganda were males. The LRA Command was usually reluctant to send girls. They assumed that they were not strong fighters and had fears about their loyalty. As well, the commanders based in Sudan often wanted their wives to remain with them, to produce children.

What did the girls do?

“Most ladies, they don’t like fighting. Mostly girls were taken for cooking and carrying. They were not supposed to be in the front with the fighting, they were supposed to stay behind for cooking.”

Of course there were exceptions. There were girls who really enjoyed combat and were eager to accompany their husbands in the field. One returnee remembers, “I knew one girl who loved fighting. As soon as she would hear a gun shot, she would jump up, take off her bloused and begin to run towards that noise with her gun ready.” The female senior originals had proven themselves as fighters and preferred to be on missions.”

So there were significant differences in terms of the level of participation and the types of jobs that girls took on. Many filled support functions. Others were active members of the abduction units and also participated, alongside males, in attacks on camps or battles with the UPDF.
“For me the hardest part that I experienced was that I was taken for fighting. And you were expected to fight like a man. Every time they are taking you to the front. I got wounded by splinters and bullets – there is no way that you can escape this if you have taken long in the bush.”

“Within a few weeks I was ready to shoot targets, single, rapid, advance and withdraw.

I was handed a gun. This gun became my husband, my brother, my sister, my father and my mother. It gave me respect, freedom and protection. With the gun no man could fool me around. They knew I could be as dangerous as them.”

But there were limits to the amount any female was trusted. For example, the LRA often hid caches of weapons and bullets in northern Uganda. Girls would be instructed to wait while this was done – they were not allowed to look to see where the weapons were hidden. The one exception to this might be a female senior original with a high rank.

3. Looting Missions

Looting was an essential part of LRA operations. When the LRA had its headquarters in Sudan, looting Dinka villages provided supplies and food to complement their gardens’ produce. Later, when the LRA was on the move, looting of Sudan Army barracks provided their main source of food.

What did the girls do?

Girls participated equally with boys on looting missions but their roles were different. The male soldiers would begin the attack with girls lined up behind them. As soon as the LRA soldiers had begun to overcome their target, girls would be sent in to grab up as much food and supplies as they could:
“When we were looting the Sudan Army barracks, we would always wait until the early afternoon. Sudan is very hot, so after lunch they would sleep. They would wake up at around 2:30 so you had to do it before then.

The LRA would boil the cassava around noon, to get energy for the mission. The advance party would go close to the barracks, just observing everything. They might watch for hour or so to make sure that they were sleeping. Then the attack would start.

They lined up the soldiers. They put the girls, the wives and ting tings, behind them. Everything was fast. We had to do it this way because the airplanes would come and shoot at us. The Sudan Army was getting tired of us looting them and would send out an alarm right away. We had about 20 minutes, no more.

The LRA soldiers would start shooting. When they started running, you had to run too. The girls’ job was to look for things while the fighting was going on. We were in the middle of it – bullets coming from both directions. We weren’t allowed to carry guns in the raids of the Sudan barracks because they wanted both our hands to be free to get as much as possible.

The shooting would be going on all around you. The LRA soldiers would also be grabbing things and throwing them for us to take. You kept on running, running. You would be so tired; you would be so scared.

That is how it was. The ones who participated were the wives who didn’t have children and the ting tings. It had to be people who could run and were not sick. Some mothers volunteered to go on these raids. They would hide food for themselves and their children. You weren’t allowed to do this; you were supposed to give everything to the commander. But a lot of mothers did it.

Sometimes it wasn’t possible to do a raid, but you couldn’t go back. The order was that you couldn’t return unless you had food.”
LRA Fighting Methods:

The LRA were runners – they ran into battle, guns blazing. Many of them fought bare chested, even the commanders. They would tie their shirts around their waist or neck. Girls were usually required to remove their blouse when they were fighting.

“You were supposed to be always running, even those who were carrying luggage. At times the bullets were so much. If you tried to dodge them by bending down, they would scream at you, “No, you must stand; you must fight like a true soldier. You had to run ahead, following the others.

I remember one night we entered into an ambush. We were very close to the Ugandan Army. We could see the fire of the bullets passing all around us. But the commander said, “No, no, you must go straight ahead, you must pass through that zone.

You could hear the bullets: whizz, bang, like that. They kept shouting at us to go ahead, to go more quickly. I was amazed that I didn’t get a bullet. Later I found one in the bag that I was carrying on my back.”

A key LRA strategy was the use of surprise. They were quiet runners, moving through fields at lightning speed. Advance parties ensured all was clear. Girls carried luggage, particularly luggage associated with cooking. Pot, pans, jerry cans – all these are noisy objects. The commanders were continually threatening them about making any noise:

“We were walking along. The girls were in the middle – that is usually where they put us. They told us not to bang them. They said that they would kill us if we did that. The commander showed us the silencer gun he had to do it.

There was the smell of ammunition, the fire of the bullets in the sky. We kept walking. My jerry can hit against the pan. It made a kind of “galooop” noise. I was so scared.

Then we all had to go through water. That also made a noise, a kind of squeaky, slushing noise. But they didn’t mind that one – maybe because everyone was doing that, not just the girls.”
Girls suffered from many forms of violence: “punishments” from the commander husbands, wounds acquired in battles and pinching/hitting by the first wives.

When girls received a punishment they were not allowed to cry out—this only resulted in additional canning or kicks.

Their bodies house the marks and memories of these violations, times when girls were kicked, beaten, forced to stand in the broiling sun or lie on ant and termite hills.

The following pages contain examples of the violence done to girls held by the LRA.

In the workshops front and back outlines were made and, as each girl came forward, she made red marks on the silhouettes to indicate where she had received a punishment, a bullet or other injury on her body. The text below is taken from those discussions.

- On the head: My hair fell out because of carrying tins full of bullets. Even up to now I am feeling chest pain. And I have some wounds because they canned me with a panga.

- I have some wounds on my legs. My leg was swollen and it was so difficult to move, but they said that I must continue.

- I carried a lot of heavy loads so my hair on the top of my head fell out is gone forever.

- They asked me to write the letters of my name. There were six letters. So they hit me with the panga six times on my back. I have the wounds from that.

- As a new person I was canned on the back of my legs (the calves) with a chain so that I couldn’t escape. That is very common.

- For my case I was canned on my buttocks—there is a scar still there.

- When they abducted us from the school, they brought a very big syringe (one used for cows) and injected each of us with it. For me it caused a big wound in my buttocks that I still have 14 years later.
When I was there I was canned seriously from morning to evening. My friend had escaped, so they canned me, saying that I must know where she was.

The first time they told me to cook, I did it badly. They forced me to eat all the food. My stomach became very swollen. I almost died.

A bullet in my back: When we were moving on our way to southern Sudan, we were attacked. I received a bullet in my back and also, when I was running from the shooting, I jumped into a valley and really hurt my leg. Up until now I still have the bullet in my back.

One of my friends escaped. They said that I was the one who planned it. They caught my friend and took both of us into the bush for canning. My arms swelled so much. My friend died from the canning.

One time I didn’t have any soap so I borrowed some from a boy. They said that I loved him, so they canned me 100 strokes and then 50 hits with the panga on my back.

During the training, we didn’t know what to do, partly because they spoke in Swahili. They said that was a soldiers’ language. So they slapped us because we didn’t follow their instructions.

Five of us tried to escape. They caught us and canned us seriously for that. Three of the five died from the canning.

They hit me around my mouth.

I was forced to have sex when I was still young. He was “over sized” and the next day I couldn’t move.

They took me for fighting. I said that I didn’t want to do it but they insisted. I was shot in the stomach and part of my intestines came out.

I was carrying a bomb, a bag with clothes and some food. It was very heavy and I was so tired. I gave the bomb to a new girl to carry. They asked her, “Who gave you that bomb?” She pointed at me. So they came to me and demanded why I had done this. They canned me seriously for this.

When I was still in Uganda and we were moving, I was cooking chicken. We were attacked and they said that I had to carry it even though it was hot. I had to run with the saucepan on my head. The sauce spilled on to my skin and burned my head and back.

We had to cut grass to make a hut. One person escaped. When they called for her, she didn’t answer. When we went back and reported that she had escaped, they became so angry. They said, “You encouraged her to do this.” The punishment was 20 strokes (10 on each side) with the panga and then more strokes with sticks on our buttocks.
They canned me because my clothes were a little dirty. Then for a while, they were always giving me punishments because of that one mistake.

They shot my leg and it was broken.

They gave me to a man when I was very young – only 12 years old. I didn’t know what to do. So they caned me because I wasn’t doing things that were expected of me.

I gave birth when I was very young, so I didn’t know how to look after the child properly. They punished me because of that.

When my husband died, they transferred me to another one. The first husband was somehow fair compared to this new one.

Some were accused of being witches. There were 36 of them - they killed them. They took them outside and killed them.

The first time I was abducted I was 10 years. They beat me so many times because I kept trying to escape.

- The first time they cut my arms with a panga. I still have the scars.
- The next time they cut my arms and hands with an axe. They said that they did this to remind me what would happen if I tried again.
- They said that they would start by chopping my hands first – one hand at a time. They told me that I would be left with no hands or legs. So I stopped trying.
Relationships: Friends, Enemies and Power Struggles

Females in captivity with the Lord’s Resistance Army lived in an impossible situation. It allowed almost no space for normal human interactions. Instead, they received punishments, torture and disrespect. All struggled to find a measure of security and dignity, but so many forces were working against them. As one returnee explained, “Each one was fighting for her own soul.”

The LRA command structures were described earlier. This was a hierarchical system which dictated how people related to each other, based on their functions and status.

The originals (particularly the senior originals) held a certain power and related to others according to that template. The first wives filled another function and lived out these imperatives in their conduct with others. Those who were pregnant or who had children occupied a favoured place inside the LRA hierarchy. The new wives, the pretty or educated ones, held another position.

Inside these forces, alliances and friendships did exist. But it was difficult. The LRA system was organized on the basis of functions, not people. This meant that normal human interaction could be interpreted as a rebellion against the LRA’s idea of how the world should be organized.

Relationships with Men:

Girls had few expectations of kindness from their husbands or the male soldiers. It is just as well – they rarely received it. The commanders were not interested in any real communication with their wives. For them, the wives’ role was to listen and to be obedient. The smallest gesture of independence was harshly punished. It is not too much to say that these men saw wives as objects, not human beings.

Husbands required passivity from their wives. Nothing seemed to make them angrier than females who showed spirit or independent thought. They would be determined to break them and often used extreme punishment:

“There was one girl who refused to show that they had broken her. Her husband was always giving her punishments. He wanted her to fear him, to recognize that he had power over her, that he held her life in his hands. He wanted her to just be so weak in front of her. But she would never show him this. She was very strong.

The husband would tell her that she would receive a caning because she had not shown him respect. She would say, “Fine” and lay down on the ground, calling out to him, saying, “I’m ready.” This would make him so angry so he would command the boys to cane her seriously. But she would never cry, no matter what.”
The husbands were very fickle. They would often try to promote jealousy amongst the wives. And this did indeed cause friction. But was not jealousy for the love at that man. It was based on the recognition that he had so much power over them.

A relationship with the escorts and male soldiers was dangerous. The commanders were always looking for signs of disloyalty or, in many cases, inventing them:

“You were not allowed to speak to other men. They said that if you began to talk freely, the temptation might come, that the man might start using love words to you. And you had already been given to another man, you were owned by it. So you were not permitted to talk to others.”

**Senior Originals Girls:**

The female originals took great pride in their capacities as fighters and received respect for this from male soldiers. As one said, “I loved my gun.”

When the LRA were on missions, the focus was on outcomes and practical issues. If a person could shoot well and handle him/herself in an attack that was all that was required. Inside these situations, being a female was not a problem. Loyalties were based on battlefield experiences.

Senior female originals totally embraced this way of life. They preferred male company. In fact, they were often hostile to wives, seeing them as weak and not deserving of their respect. They did not see themselves as member of that community. Instead they were eager to be part of the male military world.

Of course, the female originals had a major problem once they returned to the camps. Once there, they were expected to revert to the position of wife. The power they had enjoyed on a mission evaporated. They were vulnerable to the whims of the husband, the threat of new wives and the influence of the first wives. This was a hard change.

- “The originals thought that they were going to take over the government. They wanted to push down the younger ones, to make sure that they never took over from them.”

- “The original girls were not friendly. For example, when you had just been brought, you had only one cloth. There was nothing to change so that you could wash the other one. So they said that you were dirty. They said that you must be canned because you are very dirty and didn’t wash your clothes properly, like a good wife.”

- “A big problem came when they started abducting students. The originals were so worried because they assumed that schoolgirls would be loved more by the commanders. If you could speak one word of English, they would abuse you.”
You would not want them to know that you had been abducted from school but there is no way that you can escape from it being known. The commanders would brag about it, saying that they would have a real teacher, someone who knew how to read and write. So the school children, especially the ting tings, would be tortured so much.”

**Inside the Compounds:**

Most girls functioned inside a female world of wives and ting tings. This had both good and disappointing aspects.

Strong loyalties were established amongst groups of women. Many were in the bush together for eight years or more. But there were other, less positive factors. The first wife system was organized to make people suspicious of each other. It gave one person a considerable amount of power over others. This could result in both physical and emotional pain. Wives and ting tings were often a victim of the power dynamics operating inside the commanders’ compounds. When girls talk about their time in the bush, one of the hardest memories is how they were treated by the first wives.

**Friendships:**

One returnee stated, “You had to have a friend, someone you could talk to and trust – otherwise it would be just too hard. But you had to be careful who you chose.” Friendships were very important. Friends provided support and advice. You could share laughter and secrets with each other without fear that this would result in a punishment. You could make fun of the first wives and originals together.

“I remember every time we were moving with the convey. At times the originals might start to abuse you, saying all the women had to stand, even though our legs were swelling. I cried until I could no longer cry. Finally I said to them, “Let me turn around, I think you have finished hitting my front, you probably want to start now on my back. That made them so angry. But later my friend and I were laughing about this and it made me feel better.”

When a girl received a caning, her friends could help soothe the wounds. They also provided practical assistance. As one person said, “I was so glad that I had a friend when I was giving birth, I could trust that she would look after my other child.” A friend was a life-saver inside a situation which had no other sources of support.
**Power Struggles:**

These friendships operated on tricky ground. In the compound, the main power brokers were the commander husbands and the first wives. Both were determined to hold onto this power and viewed others as a threat.

The first wife usually aligned herself with the 2nd and 3rd wives – they formed a group. These women insisted on deference from the other wives and the ting tings.

Ting tings were often singled out for mistreatment. They had no voice, no one to stick up for them. Many first wives used them as housemaids, forcing them to work long hours each day. Ting tings were constantly doing chores of one sort or another – laundry, garden work, fetching water, childcare or assisting in the kitchen. First wives frequently took their frustrations out on ting tings. A first wife might call a ting ting into her hut and, once inside this privacy would slap or pinch her. Fatuma, Kony’s first wife for many years, was famous for this.

“Yes, there was mistreatment by the first wife. She liked punishing the young ones. If you were late, she would slap you. We never reported it because we knew that we would be canned seriously. So you just kept quiet.”

But for most ting tings the greater problem came as they were maturing. Once these young girls caught the eye of the commander, they would be in “hot soup”. The first wives were always scared that a new wife would receive favours that she believed more rightfully belonged to her. As one person explained:

“They would not look at you with good eyes. They would start to abuse you, giving you so much work to do. They would make you fetch water all day long or give you so much laundry.”

If ting tings were a major concern, first wives also were eager for all the females in the compound to bend to their will.

“These people, they used to abuse. They often picked on me. I told my friend, “I am tired of this abuse for no reason.” I tried to do things to annoy them. I thought that would make them give up.

One time, to make them angry, I went to the commander’s room. He was so surprised to see me. He said, “This is the first time you have come to my room except when I have called for you. What have you done now? One day when I am not around, those people will kill you, I am telling you.”

When I came out of his place, I just smiled. I wouldn’t let them see that I was afraid of them.”
Other dynamics were also at work. First wives were always monitoring the situation inside the compound. This was for both their welfare and for their husbands. They would try to recruit “informers” to provide information on what the other wives were thinking and doing. These intermediaries would be given favours, a fact everyone was aware of. They were always watching each other for evidence that someone had received something new or special. This would provoke suspicion – there was always a low level of tension in the compound, something that could flare up easily.

Many first wives used their power wives to exact revenge on those who didn’t show proper respect. For example, sometimes the wives would refuse to follow her orders. In these cases she would probably ask the commander to order appropriate punishments.

The response would vary. Commanders who were very close to their first wives would probably comply and order a caning. In order to keep the peace others might just give a small punishment such as cutting grass.

Fatuma, Kony's first wife, was known for her cruelty:

- “Fatuma was a mean person. She could report you to Kony saying you had done something even though you had not done it. In my case, this happened and I was canned 300 strokes. I think I died during it. I just revived afterwards.”

- “Kony would be praising somebody, “Ah that one, this is my only wife.” Fatuma, the first wife, wouldn’t say anything, but she would call that girl to come to her hut and abuse her - pinching, slapping and canning. She would slap you herself and then would say that you better keep this to yourself that it was between you and her.”

In the section on sexual violence, there are several quotes about the tense relationship between first wives and the newer ones. The first wives would try to control a commander’s access to these girls, principally by threatening and physically hurting these girls before or after they were with the husband:

“If you had just arrived and the man called you for, the first wives would start knocking on the door calling your name, saying, “You come out, you come out. “They would be waiting for you with knives; they might try to chop you with it. They didn’t want you to go in the house with the man.”

Kony and the other commanders seemed to delight in causing friction amongst the wives.

“My name is Janet, the same as the Prime Minister’s wife. So when Kony heard this, he was so excited. Before I came he was telling the other wives in the headquarters [in southern Sudan] “My first lady is coming. She is learned, she is a schoolgirl and she is going to be my Queen.”
He told the other wives, “You are going to be the one to wash her slippers and clothes. You are going to be the one that will be fanning her, giving her fresh air. I don’t want my first lady to do anything, she has to just sit.”

They had not met me; all they were hearing was all that they were going to have to do for me. So when I arrived I was in the hot soup. Everyone hated me and wanted to kill me. The first ladies tried several times to kill me with a knife.”

Friction Between the Wives:

The difficulties with the first wife were not the only ones. In a world where “producing” was considered so important, wives who were unable to become pregnant were at a severe disadvantage. They would often resent the favours given to mothers:

“In our household the girls who did not have children would often be on bad terms with the child mothers. The commanders would select the ones who did not have children and make them go for looting and getting food. When they came back they often didn’t want to give the child mothers a share. They would say, “You are just sitting there, while we are doing so much.”

“The ones with children, they saw themselves as superior. When you have a child you will feel proud because you will be released from other responsibilities. So you can see the other ones without children as the housemaids.”

“There are girls who are not having children, they always take you for looting. You had to hand over the things you got to the big wife. She was the one to decide what you would get. You had suffered with bullets and the rest of it, but you might get only a very little. The rest would remain with her. So that one will bring irritation amongst the women.”

These are complex issues, ones which are difficult to understand outside the context.

“Yes there was a lot of abuse. It happened in so many ways. For many girls the hardest part was the treatment from other women. That disappointed them so much, and many still feel bitter about what was done to them by first wives. But you have to understand. Sometimes, after you have gone through very hard conditions, you can take it out on others.”
The Final Stages of the War

In March 2002, the UPDF launched a major military offensive called "Operation Iron Fist" against the LRA base in Sudan. The Sudan Government gave permission for the UPDF to operate in certain regions of southern Sudan. Also, after a considerable amount of international lobbying, the Sudan Government severed its relationship with the Lord’s Resistance Army, officially telling them that they were no longer welcome in Sudan.

Initially, Joseph Kony maintained that this was just another stage in a war that would ultimately lead to the LRA’s victory. However, as things progressed it was clear that the LRA was in trouble.

Kony made decisions to break up the LRA battalions into different components. Though he had always professed his great love for children, now they presented a logistical problem. The LRA was on the move. Children could not manage the long marches required. In trying to hide from the enemy, the LRA needed silence and control over people’s actions – neither is possible with babies or children:

“Kony told us that this was going to be a tough moment, that there was going to be a big battle with the Ugandan Government. After that, the LRA would take over. One of the worries was easy movement. He saw that wives who were weak or who had several children were an impediment.

Every commander was told to identify a certain number of his wives. These people were divided into groups for safe keeping.

He also put some of his wives under the care of his top commanders, particularly those who had more than one child.”

Kony created two brigades – one to northern Uganda, the other to the mountain areas of southern Sudan. This presented different types of possibilities and difficulties for women.

Southern Sudan:

Most of the women who stayed in Sudan usually had only one child, many had none. Their brigade escaped to the mountain regions in the western part of Sudan – an area of sparse resources and extreme temperatures. In the night it was cold, the daytime blisteringly hot.

This brigade was forever on the move, trying to evade bombing from UPDF or Sudanese airplanes. Raiding squads were the main source of food. This was a harsh time, particularly for those who were pregnant:
“These girls were expected to give birth and then to keep marching. Yes it was terrible but there was no other way for it to be. If you said that you were too weak, that you couldn’t do it, the commanders would not accept this. Some women would be killed, those who stayed behind.”

**Northern Uganda:**

The majority of the wives had children, so high numbers were sent back to northern Uganda. The journey back was very difficult, particularly with children. The commanders were in front, the mothers and children in the middle. The senior originals were in the back to provide protection.

In addition to their children, women carried loads on their heads. Many lost their hair because of the weight and heat. There was little food – starvation and death from thirst was common.

“The children would get very tired because of all the marching. We would leave at night, when it was still a bit cool. They wouldn’t want to wake up. So you had to beat them. They were not allowed to cry. These children were really trained in this.”

One mother describes what she went through:

“People were scattered. If you found a group you just went with them. You didn’t know where you were running to, you just ran. The ones with a child, they wouldn’t give you a gun – they would say to have both a child and a gun is impossible.

At first they gave me a boy to carry my older child, but that boy died in an attack. My daughter tried to walk on her own but she was only four. So I had one at the back and one at the neck. I had to find something to eat for them - that was hard.

We reached the border, on the Uganda side, near Kitgum. We were 50. Everyone was weak; we had been walking without anything. We stayed there for two weeks.

Then the Uganda soldiers realized that we were there. They came and attacked us. We ran, so we found another group and we hid for another week. But they kept following us.”

Sometimes the soldiers would take pity on the mothers and their children and release them to a nearby village. They would say to the community leader, “These are our women so if you hurt them in any way we will come and kill you.” Many demanded that an announcement be made over the radio, saying that all was well.
While this was a huge blessing for those lucky enough to be released, it was probably more a practical decision than kindness. For example, it was normally limited to mothers with more than two children. Kony wives were not supposed to be released. But some succeeded, as is described in the following story.

**My Way Back Home**

“I went to the commander who was always communicating with Kony. I said, “Please ask Kony if he can release me so that I can go home with my children.”

Kony refused. He said that that another one of his wives could take my children back to Uganda but that I should remain with him. He favoured me somehow. I said, “I cannot go without my children.”

The following day, the UPDF were attacking us again. We started running. I said to another girl who had children, I said “Let us wait here.” They said, “Oh, you people are going to try to escape.” We said, “No it is just that we have two two children and we cannot go so fast.”

So we remained on the other side. We found a hut and slept there.

The next morning we found a woman that had come to weed her garden. We went towards to her. She was scared of us. She said, “Where are you from? You look very strange.”

And in fact we were looking strange. We said that we had escaped. We asked her to take us to the government soldiers. So she left her weeding and took us to the barracks.

**At the Government Barracks**

At first when they saw us they were surprised. They were feeling so badly because of how we looked. And they said, “So this is how Kony is treating these people.” Because all of our bodies had scabs and our children, you couldn’t even really imagine that they were children, they were so malnourished.

They prepared porridge for us. They told us to bathe, and then they gave us a lunch. Then they gave us food and told us to cook for ourselves. They gave us a grass hut. After two days the vehicle came and took us to Lira to the rehabilitation centre.”
Times Past, The Way Forward:

At this point - late 2013 - the war seems to be over. The northern Uganda region is trying to restore their lives and communities. For female returnees, this hasn’t been easy. All describe struggles to re-establish lives that have been so damaged by the time in the bush. Hopes and dreams are confronted by harsh realities. Many have been rejected by their families and communities. Physical injuries are common. For all there is the memory of past injustices. The past is a shadow in their hearts.

But female returnees are working hard to create a positive future for both themselves and their children. They recognize the many obstacles that must be overcome – both internal and external. The following quotes illustrate thoughts on this process.

- “The bad memory that I have, and this is still tormenting me to today, is the beating that I suffered from while I was in the bush. I came back with four children. The man who was the father of these children refused me and even my family refused me. My family refused me because they said that I had participated in the war. Yes, I was a fighter. But I was also a child. I had no choice.”

- “When I came home, my parents were very, very happy to see me. They had thought I was dead. When I reached my home I was carrying my baby. They carried us. All my friends and the neighbours assembled to welcome me. Some whose children were still in the bush would come to ask me about their children.

But others would say, ‘Look at these girls, they have abducted our children and left our children in the bush, now they are coming home to enjoy their life. Sometimes they would say to me, “Don’t be proud - you were just the wife of a LRA commander.” This hurts me so much.”

- “For my child who was born in the bush it can be hard for her now that we are back home. She hears them saying that she is a child of Kony and that they don’t want these rebel children in their community.”
“When I was in the bush I underwent a lot of pain and torture. And now, at least, there are some improvements in my life – all the bad experiences in the bush are no longer there.

Sometimes I have time for laughing and maybe chatting with others. I am very happy about that. I want my future to be bright. I am really hoping that my children can go to school.

I was not able to have an education. I don’t want the same thing to happen to them. I want the future for my children to be good, a brighter future for them.”

“The man who I was given to was old and he had HIV. So I became wounded from that. After I came back I went for tailoring and I have got some work, though the money is little. My child is now in Senior 1. But I worry – I feel that I could die at any time. I fall sick. I really need someone who will take care of my child and make sure that he has a good future.”

“The first time that I knew that I was pregnant I was so sad. Because I did not want to have children. I could see how hard life was for them in the bush and also for the mothers. But after delivering I was so happy for that baby. And I continue to feel that way, even though there are difficulties. I love her so much.”

“Before I became a fighter I was really scared about it, what it meant that I would be forced to do. How many people would I have to kill? I don’t really know the answer to that question, even now, because you go to the front and you just fight.

Afterwards there are a lot of dead people lying around everywhere. I would be wondering, “Am I the one who shot this person? Am I the one who killed him?

When I came back home I promised myself that none of my children would ever go to fighting. Now I know what fighting is – I don’t want my children to feel that.”
“When I returned I found that my parents were dead. So I decided that I had to get another man. I found one that accepted me.

After I had delivered two children for him, he decided that he didn’t want the children from the bush. He told me that I couldn’t keep them anymore. But what am I to do? They are my children.

It is hard for my children. In the village they were saying that they didn’t want these rebel children around. So I had to leave with them.”

“Whenever I came back most of the relatives rejected me. I had nowhere to stay in my village. So I came to town to rent a place and to find work. The problem is that no one will hire you if you do not have an education. Most of the girls who were in the bush do not have an education because the LRA ruined our future.”

“The time in the bush was so hard. There was a lot of pain and torture. The torture was from both the men and the women. It was not easy. There was also a lot of fighting – I thank god that nothing happened to me during that time.

Since I have come home there have been some good conditions. I was able to go back to school. So all the darkness, I was experiencing, I am forgetting that.

If all goes well, I will complete my studies I am going to have a brighter future. I am going to forget everything that happened in the past. I am going to have hope for my future.”