

Reintegration of Amnestied LRA Ex-Combatants and Survivors' Resistance Acts in Acholiland, Northern Uganda

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ABSTRACT[∞]

This article examines the social dynamics among survivors and amnestied Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) ex-combatants living together in Acholiland, asking how and if Acholi survivors have forgiven Acholi LRA returnees, forgotten past violence and moved on, as stated in northern Uganda's amnesty framework. The amnestied LRA ex-combatants interviewed stated that they wanted and needed to reintegrate among Acholi survivors. Yet, after two decades of amnesty, the magnitude of the brutality of the war remains etched in survivors' minds. My ethnographic findings suggest feigned compliance as well as resistance to amnesty by-laws. Many practise what I call *survivors' acts of resistance*, which includes name calling, attributing misfortune to the presence of ex-combatants, stigmatization and stealing. In short, survivors make returnees' lives unbearable. My analysis is framed in reference to and critique of conventional transitional justice mechanisms and I underscore the importance of *memory* in the cessation of war violence and the restoration of peace.

KEYWORDS: amnesty, forgiveness, survivors, Lord's Resistance Army, remembering, Uganda

AMNESTY AND CESSATION OF WAR VIOLENCE IN ACHOLILAND

The war in northern Uganda started in 1986 and lasted for about two decades. The Acholi people of Acholiland¹ were the most heavily impacted by the Lord's

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1 See, Frank K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1960). Girling's work on the Acholi people and traditions in Acholiland covers the region in which I conducted this ethnographic fieldwork. In early 2000, Acholiland covered the districts of Gulu and Kitgum. In 2018, due to the government's decentralization policy, Acholiland covered the districts of Amuru, Gulu, Kitgum, Pader, Agago, Nwoya, Lamwo and Omoro.

Resistance Army (LRA) tactics of setting camps ablaze, looting property, child abduction, forced conscription and the massacre of civilians.² The UN International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) estimated that up to 24,000 children aged between seven and 17 were abducted during the conflict.³ The highest proportion of LRA fighters were Acholi people, led by the LRA commander Joseph Kony, under whose leadership they inflicted atrocities on their own people in their own communities.

In seeking to transition from armed conflict to participatory, democratic forms of governance in early 2000, the Ugandan government enacted the Amnesty Act, which provided amnesty to all armed fighters, not only the LRA. By mid-2004, over 5,000 former LRA fighters had voluntarily surrendered and applied for amnesty cards,⁴ while some LRA fighters who had been captured during battle received amnesty following interrogation.⁵ Amnestied ex-combatants were subsequently reintegrated into Acholi communities where they had perpetrated many war atrocities. In Acholiland, the literal translation for the amnesty card or certificate is *waraga me timo kica* (certificate of mercy/forgiveness). The main supporters of the amnesty initiative were political activists, local and international humanitarian organizations, as well as influential religious and cultural leaders.⁶

- 2 Tim Allen, *Trial Justice: The International Criminal Court and the Lord's Resistance Army* (London: Zed Books, 2006); Els de Temmerman, *Aboke Girls: Children Abducted in Northern Uganda* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2001); Sverker Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings: War and Existential Uncertainty in Acholiland, Northern Uganda* (Philadelphia, PA: Coronet Books, 2003); Grace Akello, *Wartime Children's Suffering and Quests for Therapy in Northern Uganda* (Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2010); Grace Akello, Annemiek Richters and Ria Reis, 'Coming to Terms with Accountability: Why the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers in Northern Uganda Fails,' in *Memory, Narrative and Forgiveness: Perspectives on the Unfinished Journeys of the Past*, ed. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela and Chris van der Merwe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Theo Hollander and Bani Gill, 'Every Day the War Continues in My Body: Examining the Marked Body in Postconflict Northern Uganda,' *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 8(2) (2014): 217–234.
- 3 UNICEF, *Comprehensive Education Assessment in Eight Conflict-Affected Districts* (Kampala, 2004).
- 4 *Ibid.*; Allen, *supra* n 2; Amnesty International, 'Public Statement,' AFR 59/001/2004 (30 January 2004).
- 5 It is important to note that Uganda is also a signatory of the International Criminal Court (ICC). Uganda is therefore obliged to arrest top LRA commanders and present them to the ICC. Holding war perpetrators to account was one of the government's strategies to end the war. In this regard, Uganda has presented Dominic Ongwen for trial in the Hague. Within Uganda, too, there is an International Criminal Division (ICD), which is mandated to conduct trials of LRA returnees who are not amnestied. Notably, only one former LRA fighter, Colonel Thomas Kwoyelo, who was captured on 3 March 2009 during battle in the Democratic Republic of Congo, has been brought to trial. But on 22 September 2011, the Constitutional Court of Uganda decided that Kwoyelo's trial in the ICD should be stopped, because some lawyers questioned why the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Amnesty Commission had denied Kwoyelo's application for amnesty in February 2010. On 8 April 2015, the Supreme Court decided that Kwoyelo had been properly indicted and charged before the ICD, and allowed his trial to resume. On 24 September 2018, Dennis Ojwee, a reporter for *New Vision* national news, reported that 'Kwoyelo's pre-trial was back in Gulu after three years.' He suggested that the ongoing pre-trial conference would be followed by a pre-trial, a pre-hearing, hearing sessions and a subsequent judgment. The influence of the amnesty approach is evident in this ICD trial, as is the fact that survivors in Acholiland have insufficient awareness and understanding of criminal cases and the trial exercise. I thus focus principally on the most popularized and common approach in northern Uganda, namely the amnesty approach, rather than on the ICC and activities by ICD in Kampala.
- 6 See, Allen, *supra* n 2.

In order to reinforce the efficacy of the amnesty certificate approach, the state machinery, including local council leaders, the Uganda People's Defense Forces (UPDF), the police and returnees ensured survivor compliance through amnesty by-laws that made it an offence to insult or harass returnees and former abductees.⁷ These by-laws were publicized through local radios, workshops, sensitization seminars and village meetings, and ordered survivors to forgive, forget and move on for the sake of peace. In this article, I refer to respondents as survivors and returnees, respectively, based on their experiences during the war. These are not imposed identities because survivors were indeed exposed to various forms of war violence and the returnees were LRA ex-combatants amnestied at return.

Generally, in addition to reinforcing impunity among ex-combatants,⁸ survivors viewed the amnesty framework as a way of forcing the Acholi people to forgive the violent acts committed by the government and the LRA. According to the amnesty by-laws, survivors needed to facilitate LRA returnees' reintegration through not (showing signs of) remembering the violence they experienced. Additionally, forgiving returnees meant accepting them as community members and showing no need for reparation, compensation, restitution and accountability.⁹ The state and returnees thus saw accountability as an obstacle to peace, and threatened survivors with continued violence if they did not accept returnees' immunity from prosecution.¹⁰

Trudy Govier has noted that the social reintegration of ex-combatants is jeopardized if victims are neglected or pressured into superficial acceptance, and that superficial public processes asserting reconciliation are unsuccessful and even counterproductive if based on deception, coercion, bias and fear.¹¹ Within the amnesty framework in northern Uganda, only LRA ex-combatants were offered resettlement packages to enable them to transition to civilian life. Survivors were offered no such assistance, which often exacerbated the sense of injustice and pain that many felt. Tim Allen describes a scene where an Acholi woman had to hand over an amnesty package, including a mattress, to a former LRA brigadier well known for abducting and forcing girls into marriage, and who was seeking to gain access to some of them following his return.¹² Embedded in the amnesty approach, therefore, were acts that have been critiqued by transitional justice (TJ) scholars like

7 International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), 'Amnesty Does Not Erase the Truth: Interviews with Howard Varney, ICTJ Truth-Seeking Consultant' (2011); ICTJ, 'Conflict and Transitional Justice in Africa' (2009); International Peace Institute, *Peace, Justice and Reconciliation in Africa: Opportunities and Challenges in the Fight against Impunity* (2013); Amnesty International, *supra* n 4.

8 Amnesty International, *supra* n 4; ICTJ, 2011, *supra* n 7. In Amnesty International, 'African Union: An Opportunity to Strengthen the Promotion and Protection of the Women's Rights' (2003), the organization urged an African Union ministerial meeting, convened in Addis Ababa from 24 to 28 March 2003, to agree to the protocol to strengthen the human rights framework for the protection and promotion of women's rights in Africa.

9 See, Holly Porter, *After Rape: Violence, Justice, and Social Harmony in Uganda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). Porter alludes to the fact that in spite of Acholi people's experience of violent acts, they welcomed home members of the LRA, and preached – and often practised – extraordinary forgiveness.

10 *Ibid.*; International Peace Institute, *supra* n 7.

11 Trudy Govier, *Taking Wrongs Seriously: Acknowledgement, Reconciliation, and the Politics of Sustainable Peace* (New York: Humanity Books, 2006).

12 *Ibid.*; Allen, *supra* n 2.

M. Brinton Lykes, Hugo van der Merwe and Alison Crosby,¹³ who assert that in many contexts TJ processes have failed to adequately take into account women and child survivors of human rights violations, particularly sexual violence. Indeed, sometimes the judicial processes through which victims seek redress and accountability are themselves retraumatizing. In essence, gross underestimations of sexual harm against women in truth and reconciliation processes have been exacerbated by the judicialization of TJ, in which an essential narrative of sexual harm hypervisibilizes women as victims.¹⁴

I argue that reconciliation is critical to attaining lasting peace, the cessation of violence and the establishment of a just postconflict society governed by the rule of law.¹⁵ Generally, reintegrating amnestied LRA soldiers among survivors seems at odds with the notion of reconciliation. During interviews, survivors preferred fairness and yearned to see TJ meted out, to make returnees accountable for their violence and to see strict punishment for human rights violations.¹⁶

Recognized TJ methods include prosecutions (criminal prosecution and punishment), truth seeking and truth telling, reparations, institutional reforms and other 'indigenous' forms of reconciliation.¹⁷ I suggest that *survivors' acts of resistance* enabled them to engage in truth telling and other indigenous forms of reparation to attain relative social harmony. According to Govier, the meanings of reconciliation range from social unity and harmony to the cessation of physical violence.¹⁸ Survivors' acts of resistance in the context of the state's top-down¹⁹ amnesty approaches have had various repercussions, including the punishment and (limited) reintegration of LRA ex-combatants. Generally, survivors and ex-combatants live in relative social harmony. According to conventional TJ mechanisms,²⁰ however, it could be said that survivors have been denied the right to publicly engage with the violent past, and it would initially appear that Acholi survivors are repressed and have *not* received reparations (indeed, Acholi survivors are still seeking TJ). Nevertheless, another reality is that survivors' acts of resistance have enabled them to deal with war violence and its aftermath, even while striving to achieve social harmony. Although Vishal Gupta and Shailendra Singh argue that in collectivist cultures people are tolerant of injustice

13 M. Brinton Lykes and Hugo van der Merwe, 'Exploring/Expanding the Reach of Transitional Justice,' *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 11(3) (2017): 371–377; Alison Crosby and M. Brinton Lykes, 'Mayan Women Survivors Speak: The Gendered Relations of Truth Telling in Postwar Guatemala,' *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 5(3) (2011): 456–476.

14 Crosby and Lykes, *supra* n 13.

15 *Ibid.*; International Peace Institute, *supra* n 7; Johan Galtung, 'Twelve Creative Ways to Foster Reconciliation after Violence,' *Intervention* 3(3) (2005): 222–234.

16 Laurel E. Fletcher and Harvey M. Weinstein, 'Violence and Social Repair: Rethinking the Contribution of Justice to Reconciliation,' *Human Rights Quarterly* 24 (2002): 573–639; Akello et al., *supra* n 2.

17 Akello et al., *supra* n 2; International Peace Institute, *supra* n 7.

18 In Martha Minow, 'Taking Wrongs Seriously: Acknowledgment, Reconciliation, and the Politics of Sustainable Peace, Trudy Govier,' *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 2(1) (2008): 116–117; International Peace Institute, *supra* n 7.

19 For a critique of top-down TJ approaches, see, Laura Arriaza and Naomi Roht-Arriaza, 'Social Reconstruction as a Local Process,' *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 2(2) (2008): 152–172.

20 Galtung, *supra* n 15; ICTJ, 2009, *supra* n 7; International Peace Institute, *supra* n 7.

because they focus more on maintaining interpersonal harmony,²¹ in northern Uganda survivors simultaneously dealt with injustice and maintained social harmony. I show that if reconciliation is the process through which a society learns to live together despite its troubled past,²² in this case survivor approaches stigmatized and punished LRA returnees, forcing them into remorsefulness and accountability, which led to relative social harmony. Acts of resistance among survivors originated from or were prompted by repressive state-led TJ approaches to the cessation of war and reintegration of former LRA fighters. Despite claims in state-supported amnesty reports, which suggest that amnestied returnees have been successfully reintegrated into their communities, this ethnographic study revealed survivors' resistance to this reintegration process, which they see as condoning impunity. This led me to question the reported success of the amnesty approach, where what is considered to be reconciliation – implying both a cessation of conflict and peaceful coexistence, a 'return to normal' or a 'moving on' – is both flawed and possibly western-/Eurocentric. This article describes everyday social dynamics in the context of undemocratic TJ approaches in northern Uganda, and shows how local refusal has resisted scholarship that is focused on how peace is restored in settings which have experienced war violence. If what follows the cessation of war is reconciliation, how do communities experience this in northern Uganda, particularly where LRA returnees live among survivors whom they exposed to extreme violence?²³ I return to this issue later.

METHODOLOGY

This article is based on three months of ethnographic fieldwork carried out between January and March 2018 in northern Uganda. I purposively selected respondents for intensive, multiple engagement and visited them several times.

There were 279 participants in total, including 38 (n=9 women, n=29 men) former LRA fighters and 241 purposively selected survivors. Many of the interlocutors had experienced various war atrocities, but lived in the same community as the returned LRA ex-combatants. All interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in the Acholi language.

I recruited returnees through snowball sampling, with one amnestied ex-combatant referring me to another. Some ex-combatants were LRA prisoners of war who had not willingly forsaken rebellion but had been captured by the UPDF. Many had attained high ranks within the LRA (Table 1), a reward for executing complex war missions, including massacres and the abduction of school children. According to returnees, 'All these acts were performed under duress, only when forced,'²⁴ which is why the state

21 Vishal Gupta and Shailendra Singh, 'An Empirical Study of the Dimensionality of Organizational Justice and its Relationship with Organizational Citizenship Behaviour in the Indian Context,' *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 24(6) (2013): 1277–1299.

22 Ibid.; Fletcher and Weinstein, supra n 16; Galtung, supra n 15; Amnesty International, supra n 8.

23 Maybe, as one anonymous reviewer mentioned, there is 'another reconciliation,' or something else in this social dynamic, which does not necessarily fit the Eurocentric notion of reconciliation. I call this social cohesiveness or *relative social harmony*, coloured by war violence. The volatility manifested when survivors and returnees participated in a savings scheme – at unexpected moments, survivors would break into bitter exchanges with returnees, reminding them of their violent war acts.

24 This claim, signifying a lack of remorse by amnestied ex-combatants, was quite common, and was uttered despite contradictions in their narratives where they freely described various acts of violence that they had masterminded. The amnesty approach reinforced this lack of remorse when former fighters were told that

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of returnees and survivors

Amnestied ex-combatants, rank	Male	Female	Total
Lieutenant	8	1	9
Commander	1		1
Signalor	1	2	3
Captain	18	6	24
Brigadier	1		1
Subtotal	29	9	38
Survivors			
Showed cards issued by the African Centre for Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture Victims; four had been mutilated	30	26	56
Parents killed by LRA	3	5	8
Parents maimed by LRA	4	14	18
Neighbours of returnees (had experienced nonspecified atrocities)	68	40	108
Reported violations by LRA including looting, burning of huts, child abduction and gender-based violence	40	11	51
Subtotal	145	96	241
Total	279		

forgave them. Another criterion for participant selection was whether a returnee had received an amnesty certificate from the UPDF (regardless of documented war atrocities).

Together with a research assistant (and sometimes independently), we conducted 30 FGDs and 36 individual interviews with survivors, all of which lasted for one to two hours, in order to gain an understanding of the social dynamics created by the state's amnesty policy for returning LRA ex-combatants. I interviewed 56 (n=30 men, n=26 women) survivors who identified as victims of LRA atrocities by showing certificates of treatment received from the African Centre for Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture Victims, or who had been mutilated or disabled during the war. Among those who participated in the FGDs and interviews were adults whose parents had been killed during LRA attacks (n=8), adults whose parents had been mutilated by LRA fighters (n=18), parents of LRA ex-combatants (n=15), and close relatives of LRA returnees who had experienced war atrocities at the hands of LRA fighters, including gender-based violence (n=51).

I wrote detailed fieldnotes, recorded and transcribed respondents' narratives, manually categorized recurring themes and identified meaningful categories for analysis. Later, I report a selection of the interlocutors' narratives verbatim, as well as a case study which depicts cross-cutting experiences among ex-combatants.

Ethical Considerations

This study was presented to the Gulu University Ethics Committee and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology for approval within a broader study

only top LRA commanders were responsible for war crimes and would be indicted by the ICC. Everyone else had only been obeying orders, and had acted under duress. No survivor agreed with this discourse. Survivors' accounts of violence, including sexual violence, depicted the agency of their violators.

titled 'Public Authority and International Development' (approval number SS92ESS). Prior to conducting interviews, I sought consent from interlocutors, outlined the objective of the study and explained the need to interview them multiple times. Only those who gave consent were interviewed. We conducted individual interviews with LRA ex-combatants, sometimes in closed huts to ensure confidentiality. Some LRA interlocutors expressed a dislike of loud discussions and preferred not to meet my gaze during interviews, because they regarded our discussions as highly sensitive. We digitally recorded interviews when granted permission to do so, but relied heavily on fieldnotes and memory to relate ex-combatants' experiences. To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of interlocutors, pseudonyms have been used. Although many survivors showed distress during our discussions, and ethical guidelines suggested referral to a psychiatric clinic, none accepted referral for counselling. Some women mentioned that it was better for them to talk openly and express their emotions to someone willing to listen, as in their view 'tears clean the heart.' In this regard, I respected their wishes and did not refer them for counselling.²⁵ Additionally, I was cognizant of local resources for coping with distress (not addressed in this article).

AMNESTIED EX-COMBATANTS' IDENTITY AND EXPERIENCES UPON REINTEGRATION

I next present a case study that depicts cross-cutting experiences and identities of ex-combatants (though with a few differences between men and women), and discuss how the amnesty approach was operationalized in Acholiland and its repercussions for both survivors and returnees.

Case Study: Adoch

Adoch²⁶ was abducted by the LRA at the age of 15 when she left her camp to wash clothes at the well. Perhaps because of her boldness, she was immediately given a gun (*luduko*) after training. In order to be promoted within the ranks of the LRA (and thus receive better rations and treatment), she needed to *cele, cele, cela* (fight, fight, fight). And fight she did. For over nine years she performed her duties within the LRA with 'good discipline,' abducting as many people as possible; if she had not, she would have been killed. She said she had been 'forced to do all these things.'²⁷

25 I have vast experience as an ethnographer in Acholiland. Additionally, together with Acholi colleagues in the Mental Health Department in northern Uganda, we frequently interview people in Acholi, thus accessing *emic* views. Note that critics of trauma-focused interventions such as counselling argue that this approach only deflects people's attention away from complex forms of suffering, since the impact of violence is redefined to suggest an impact on individuals' psyches. See, Derek Summerfield, 'How Scientifically Valid Is the Knowledge Base of Global Mental Health?' *BMJ* 336(7651) (2008): 992–994; Arthur Kleinman, 'Culture and Depression,' *New England Journal of Medicine* 351(10) (2004): 951–953; Akello, *supra* n 2; Grace Akello, Annemiek Richters and Ria Reis, 'Silencing Distressed Children in the Context of War in Northern Uganda: An Analysis of its Dynamics and its Health Consequences,' *Social Science and Medicine* 71(2) (2010): 213–220.

26 Adoch is a 38-year-old ex-combatant who lives with her mother and three children. The case study has been compiled from multiple interviews with Adoch and her relatives from 4 to 17 January 2018.

27 This is an amnesty statement. At the peak of operationalizing the amnesty approach in northern Uganda, workshop facilitators, speakers at radio talk shows, UPDF officers and NGO counsellors commonly uttered statements like, 'Forgiven returnees are innocent pawns of war. They were only following orders. Only commanders are responsible for LRA violence.'

By the time the UPDF captured her after a fierce battle, she was a signaler (a post that involved using a walkie talkie and directing attacks) and had led a group to a barracks in Soroti, eastern Uganda, to attack and kill UPDF soldiers and loot their military ware. Many things happened in the LRA, she said: 'These things are difficult, and it is not easy to discuss everything. Soldiers do many things, and I did all of them.'

At the UPDF barracks where she was interrogated, not even her mother was able to recognize her. She had changed.²⁸ But she called out to her mother by name. She did not like her amnesty certificate. She wanted to join the UPDF – she saw it as an employment opportunity, and she needed to support her mother financially – but her mother reprimanded her.

Even after 10 years, her mother could easily retrieve Adoch's amnesty certificate, which was carefully stored away, as well as the UPDF introduction of Adoch to her peasant community, stating that she had been forgiven by the state and the amnesty commission. According to these documents, people should offer her any support she needed.

Within one year of her return, Adoch got married. She lived with her husband in a nearby village and had a child. She wanted the 'past to be in the past.' But one day her husband (whom she referred to as 'the man') provoked her. He had gone to her village to find out about her life and was told that she was a *lacen*, *lakwena*, *lanek*, *lalum* (one possessed by the vengeful spirits of those she had killed, a follower of Alice Lakwena,²⁹ a killer and one who had lived in the bush). They also called her *aduyi* (rebel), someone who had spent a long time with the LRA. When Adoch's husband confronted her with this information and called her *lacen*, she was so angry that she beat him, so severely that he was admitted to hospital for several months.³⁰ She could have killed him. Her mother-in-law sent her away, together with her son. They returned to live with Adoch's mother. The child was also called *latin lacen/latin lanek* (child of a person possessed by evil spirits/killer's child).

After a few years of living at home and bearing insults and abuse from survivors in her community, Adoch got married again, this time to a policeman. They lived in peace until they had a son. The policeman then also started to call her names, suggesting that he had discovered her past and wanted nothing more to do with her. Adoch beat him severely. She said at that point she had been ready to kill him. When the policeman recovered, he decided it was too risky to live with her. He sent Adoch and her second son, now also called *latin lacen/latin lanek*, to her mother.

In her third marriage, Adoch became a second wife, and lived with her husband and co-wife in a neighbouring village. After giving birth to a daughter – not a son, as

28 'Changed' is used in this context to imply differences in her physical, psychological and behavioural identity. For instance, she explained that she was no longer an innocent war-affected civilian, or a child as World Vision preferred to call her during her rehabilitation at the World Vision Centre for Traumatised Children. She saw herself as a soldier.

29 Lakwena, a female rebel leader, preceded Joseph Kony. She employed spiritism in recruiting and training a rebel group in Acholiland of which Kony was a member.

30 Godfrey Maringira, 'Militarised Minds: The Lives of Ex-Combatants in South Africa,' *Sociology* 49(1) (2015): 72–87. Maringira shows how the military identity is insufficiently addressed through disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes. In Uganda, as well as in South Africa, ex-combatants still carry military identities after rehabilitation.

she was expected to do – she started fighting with both her husband and co-wife. One day the duo attacked her, but she overpowered them. Adoch said that the two attacked her, claiming: ‘It is because of the *cen* [bad war spirits] and she is a murderer.’ The next day, her third husband and her co-wife sent her and her *latin lacen/lanek* daughter to her mother.

Thus, aged 38, Adoch was living with her mother and three children from three failed marriages. She would have preferred to stay in a stable marriage, but, she said, survivors are against her achievements. She cried as she narrated how people mistreated her, called her names and attributed any misfortune in the village to her presence. Even when she married and left the village, some survivors followed and made sure that her husband discovered her past. When I interviewed Adoch, she was restless. She wanted a stable union and to have children with one man, but this was not possible. It is respectable to be married, she explained. Only then would survivors stop calling her names.

In another narrative, 40-year-old Okot discussed how, when his clansmen discovered that he had murdered his own uncle, they sent him away, fearing the repercussions of the *cen* of a close relative. Despite having an amnesty certificate, people in his community did not assist him to reintegrate. Instead, they threatened to attack him, called him names, and, when he married, advised his wife to leave him. At the time of the interview, he was living in Gulu and could not gather the courage to visit his clansmen. In his words:

I was overjoyed for hitting my target while fighting with the LRA. When I shot at one of the relatives of one of the fighters, he [the fighter] just looked at me. That night I had to escape due to fear of being killed. I have many secrets in my heart. I do not know if I can deal with it. The UPDF immediately gave me an amnesty certificate. When I went in the village, everybody started talking about what we did. They said they do not want any killers [*lonek*] or evil people [*locen*] in the village. They were serious, so I had to escape and live in town.

The state’s preference not to discuss the atrocities with or grant justice to survivors, but rather to grant ex-combatants amnesty and reintegrate them regardless of their past violent actions, has resulted in much ‘unfinished business’ within the amnesty framework.³¹ Furthermore, survivors’ responses to these oppressive TJ mechanisms have disrupted the state’s plan of restoring peace in northern Uganda. Survivors’ everyday forms of resistance mean that neither they nor returnees have peace. One 56-year-old returnee recounted:

My own clansmen told me to leave the village after three people lost their newborn children. While weeping, one woman said it is because I had crossed her

31 Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela and Chris van der Merwe, eds., *Memory, Narrative and Forgiveness: Perspectives on the Unfinished Journeys of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

path in the week she gave birth. Many people said the same thing, that I brought misfortune and *cen* back in the village. That night, they burnt my huts and ordered my family never to return. I now live with relatives of my wife, somewhere in a soggy swamp. Many villagers talking about your past is unbearable. Everywhere you pass, they are always whispering to each other and *cimo tok* [stigmatizing].³²

In an interview with a 78-year-old ex-combatant and his wife, who were both captains when they demobilized, they mentioned how:

We tried our best to convince relatives that we did not do anything wrong, but they insisted we had done many bad things. Calling us *lolum*, *locen*, *lonck aduyi*, reminding us of all bad things which happened. When someone dies in the village, you find them weeping while calling out our names, and when we received any amnesty package, they would say we were rewarded for the killings the LRA did. During one clan meeting, villagers informed us that they had sold the land in which we had built our house or had our crops. We needed to vacate the next day. That is how we left that village. They were going to kill us if we did not.³³

During an interview with a 56-year-old returnee in Pader, he described his experience as follows:

Because many things happened in this area, people are very angry. I have seen over 10 people I was with in the LRA die, just like that – especially when they are given ‘bad/poisoned drinks.’ They die by the next day. Nobody even bothers to come and mourn. The LRA killed many people in this country, and even if people do not say much, you see them doing horrible things. When amnesty gave me a bicycle, the next day it was stolen. When I inquired from neighbours, they said they are only civilians, they do not steal – unlike the *killers or thieves* used to steal. Since I came back I cannot count the number of times they have burnt down my huts. They only say it was by accident, that only LRA fighters intentionally burn people’s huts. They have also burnt our crops, and one day my son came home bleeding seriously. I told them [my children] to be very careful and not to argue with anyone.³⁴

In three interviews, LRA returnees claimed that they could not show me their amnesty certificates because they had been burnt in their huts. They attributed such actions by their neighbours to ‘their not being able to understand amnesty laws.’³⁵ Another returnee LRA couple, after discussing how villagers had burnt their huts, suggested that:

Even if they say the burning of our homestead was by accident when an inebriated man set the huts on fire, the same acts were repeated until we migrated to

32 Personal interviews, 26 January, 12 and 14 February 2018.

33 Personal interview, 5 January 2018.

34 Personal interview, 6 March 2018 (interviewee’s emphasis).

35 Personal interviews, 5 January 2018.

an isolated place. But still survivors follow us calling us *locen*, killers, fighters. When we plant any crops, we have to protect them night and day, or else they will let animals graze on them. During harvest, our crops have been burnt or you find entire fields harvested. We have nothing to do. Because of lack of peace, the hospital has given us those medicines [carbamazepine 200mg³⁶] for a long time. We fear what they will do next.³⁷

Ten LRA ex-combatants had lost children and nobody from the village had come for the burial. They attributed this cruel reaction to their clan members' refusal to understand the amnesty by-laws to forgive and forget. A returnee discussed how,

If anything bad happens to the villagers and you do not go, they stigmatize you, reminding you that it is the behaviour of Kony's people not to bury. They also abuse you when you do go for the burial, saying that it is because of your misfortune and presence that people are dying. One just has to learn to ignore the villagers, otherwise you can fail to sleep.³⁸

In 13 interviews, returnees stated that they were uncomfortable with their neighbours' acts of resistance. Being constantly reminded of their past made their lives unbearable. Moreover, survivors also abused returnees' young children, especially when they were drunk. 'Such a life is unbearable. If we fight back, it is because we have *cen* or *lonek*,' mentioned one elderly returnee.³⁹

Many ex-combatants, aware of the repercussions of the oppressive enforcement of reintegration, lamented that

Villagers have refused to understand the amnesty *cik* [by-laws]. Just on the surface they say they have forgiven, but in their hearts you see they are very angry and willing to do anything. . . constantly abusing, ridiculing, stealing property, poisoning returnees and their animals, and burning huts. We have seen it all. We have tried everything, including punishing, ordering them to forgive, arresting and imprisoning them, but *nothing* has worked.⁴⁰

Survivors' Acts of Resistance to Amnesty

After listening to LRA returnees' narratives depicting their everyday experiences, and in particular the social dynamics in their villages, I interviewed survivors to find out their viewpoints about the amnesty approach and to ask them what ex-combatants

36 Carbamazepine is medication used primarily in the treatment of epilepsy and neuropathic pain. It is also used to treat schizophrenia along with other medications and as a second-line agent in bipolar disorder. Although this former LRA member's symptoms of *cen* overlapped with epileptic seizures, she confirmed that she had no family history of epilepsy. It is only when she sees the spirits of people she killed that she shouts in fear and, due to her falling, the doctor thought she had epilepsy and schizophrenia.

37 Personal interviews, 15, 17 and 18 February 2018.

38 Personal interview, 19 February 2018.

39 Ibid.

40 Personal interview, 13 February 2018 (interviewee's emphasis).

need to do in order to reintegrate. Many survivors mentioned that for ex-combatants to reintegrate, *myero peke gitim bal mukene* (they must do no more bad things). It was clear that survivors had set very high moral and existential standards for returnees, and had refused all amnesty mechanisms. Although survivors were reserved in their opinions during group discussions, particularly if a close friend of a returnee was present, during individual interviews many freely expressed their support for acts of resistance against returnees. In three FGDs, two women surprised me by openly discussing their bitterness towards and hatred of ex-combatants, calling them *lonék*, *lokwo* and *locen*. But even while asking to be forgiven for uttering unspeakable things,⁴¹ they said it was their only chance to express their views. In two such discussions, the group was comprised of the parents of a returnee and the daughter of a man who had been mutilated by the LRA. As I left the village with my assistant, the two women stopped us for another private interview, but also to show us their certificates of treatment from the African Centre for Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture Victims. They said they had to apologize in order to maintain social harmony,⁴² otherwise they feared that the returnee's family would dismiss them from the local village savings scheme.

One resistance tactic thus involved false compliance, as confirmed in several FGDs. For example, 12 women spoke of the amnesty approach as follows:

After the government had done many bad things to us, the government ordered us to forgive, forget and move on. . . We said yes, we have forgiven you, we have forgotten. After all, we have no power, we have no gun.⁴³

In three focus groups comprised of men and women,⁴⁴ participants said:

Yes, some LRA returnees also asked for forgiveness, but it was only over the radio. We said, we will also *forgive* them over the radio.⁴⁵ But we Acholi people, our eyes are in the hands. Unless we *see* them come to talk face to face, we cannot forgive them. We Acholi people are still waiting for them to come. . . But

41 The way in which this forgiveness was asked was clearly performative: they exercised freedom of expression but in the process reflected, as if in hindsight, on the repercussions of their utterances. It was not a remorseful apology, but an utterance that I heard from many survivors, particularly when discussing returnees' pasts. This could be called 'feigned forgiveness seeking,' which is also an act of resistance. Many survivors seemed to be accustomed to this performance – of being apologetic and seeking forgiveness, even when they did not mean it – and returnees knew it was insincere. This feigned fear and forgiveness seeking was also visible in discussions about village savings schemes, which were frequently managed by returnees. I questioned whether this fear was indeed real (not stage-managed), since in poor agrarian communities, social harmony and cohesiveness are preferred over individual needs and justice. My findings show that the desire for and relevance of social harmony cannot completely replace the need for TJ.

42 Porter, *supra* n 9.

43 FGD with women, 22 February 2018; personal interviews, women survivors, 23 and 24 February 2018.

44 FGDs, 26 and 28 February and 8 March 2018 (interviewees' emphasis).

45 The amnesty-mediated apologies have failed to redress violations by the LRA and the Ugandan government. Additionally, the amnesty process has failed to recognize institutionalized historical and social injustices and the legacy of the 20-year war in Acholiland.

when the amnesty people ask us after the workshop if we have forgiven, we say yes, we have forgiven them. We Acholi people naturally forgive and forget.⁴⁶

Three men and five women mentioned in separate interviews:

These certificates of forgiveness amount to saying: ‘Someone doing many bad things, like killing your people, puts you at gunpoint and orders you to forgive.’ We just say yes, we have forgiven you, we have forgotten everything.⁴⁷

Other acts of resistance by survivors included *cimo tok* (stigmatizing), *bolo doge* (stigma, constant reminder of the past), name calling and attributing all misfortune in the village to the presence of returnees. For instance, in six FGDs in selected villages, many agreed:

Yes we have seen it with our own eyes. As soon as *lonek* start living in the community, many people keep falling sick. People, especially children, die mysteriously. It is a sign that someone has brought *cen* in the community. That is why many people are chasing ex-combatants from homesteads to go and live elsewhere.⁴⁸

In another FGD, a 20-year-old woman mentioned the following:

Since I was about five, my mother tells me it is the *lonek* who murdered my father and grandfather in Unyama camp. I did not go very far with school because my mother could not afford. How can I forget such a thing?⁴⁹

Two women with a mutilated relative mentioned:

Our father until today cannot walk properly, he cannot dig, he cannot ride his bicycle, because the LRA cut off his lips, his toes and hands. When he sits in the shade, you can only see how sad he is. Those people are responsible for all the misery we have ever experienced and will continue experiencing. Ok, we can forget, and let’s just say our father will never forget.⁵⁰

46 Many NGO workers reported such statements being made by Acholi people when they visited communities immediately after the amnesty approach had been announced. They reported that the Acholi are naturally forgiving. The same assertion exists in James Ojera Latigo, ‘Northern Uganda: Tradition-Based Practices in the Acholi Region,’ in *Traditional Justice and Reconciliation after Violent Conflict: Learning from African Experiences*, ed. Luc Huyse and Mark Salter (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2008). Latigo speaks of the natural characteristic of Acholi people to forgive, including through rituals such as *nyano tongweno* (stepping on an egg). Some of the rituals performed in the aftermath of a crime or other wrongdoing are powerfully symbolic, emotionally evocative and socially healing, embodying rich notions of reconciliation, frequently involving the acknowledgement of wrongdoing and payment of compensation. Nevertheless, Porter, supra n 9, questions assertions that Acholi people are innately forgiving – this after observing many brutal acts, including attacks and her neighbours taking justice into their own hands. Furthermore, local approaches to dealing with witchcraft accusations, incest and sodomy can be brutal.

47 Personal interviews, various women, 22 February 2018; personal interviews, various men, 4 March 2018.

48 FGDs, some with both men and women, 26 and 28 January, 12 and 21 February and 8 March 2018.

49 FGD, 12 February 2018.

50 Personal interviews, 1 and 7 March 2018.

A 78-year-old woman mentioned several times how the government and the LRA, which had done *bal mapol* (many atrocities) in Acholiland, had awarded themselves certificates of forgiveness:

Yes, to your question, we have forgotten everything which happened, but only in our heads. [Here she changes her tone for emphasis]. . . Our hearts are still remembering. And to tell me that such a group is coming to seek forgiveness is like coming to boast about what they did. . . Merely looking at such people I get mad. I get mad with anger. I will not even allow them to speak to me. If they find me near a fireplace, I will scatter that fire in all directions in anger.⁵¹

She stood up, demonstrating her pain by sobbing and pacing the hut. She said that weeping cleansed her heart.

Interlocutors further confirmed the intentional burning of returnees' huts, false accusations, deliberately grazing their animals on returnees' land, stealing returnees' packages, ignoring returnees, belittling their discussions as ideas mediated by *cen*, and excluding returnees' relatives from village activities. Survivors' refusal to abide by the amnesty by-laws was also manifested in their constant reminders to the returnees of their violent past and how their actions had caused sadness. For example, one male returnee described how women in particular wailed and wept bitterly whenever they remembered how their children had been abducted:

I would rather deal with fellow men when it comes to talking about the LRA past. Men are quite rational and self-controlled. But women, you find them bent over, weeping bitterly and aloud, while shouting out the various actions and names of people whom the LRA murdered. No man can withstand looking at such misery. . . The only thing with men is that they can even smile back, but you never know what is in their hearts. Living with people such as these is very hard. It would have been better for the government to just punish us, instead of deceiving that even the people have agreed to forgive you, go and live with them. [Here he changes his tone.] Perhaps it is in not knowing what is hidden in men's hearts, which has led to the poisoning of many LRA ex-combatants.⁵²

Additionally, especially when survivors are inebriated, they shout at LRA returnees and weep, reminding them of what they did while in the bush, abusing them, calling their children names and uttering obscenities. There is no way of fighting back, said one returnee, since all of the other survivors will immediately join in and want to fight. Ten returnees disclosed:

Because villagers fear arrest for disobeying amnesty by-laws, they even just smear alcohol around their faces, pretend to be drunk, then come and utter all sorts of insults, reminding you of your past. Don't make the mistake of

51 Personal interview, 5 March 2018.

52 Personal interviews, 2 January and 19 February 2018.

answering back, because that is when the entire village will join in, shouting, screaming and wailing, calling you all sorts of names like *lonek*, *locen*, *lokwená*.⁵³

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the social dynamics and repercussions in communities where amnestied LRA ex-combatants have reintegrated with Acholi survivors whom they exposed to war violence. Many survivors engaged in acts of resistance against the presence of ex-combatants, which made the returnees' lives unbearable. Despite the amnesty by-laws prohibiting the mistreatment of returnees and compelling survivors to forgive and forget, survivors nevertheless found ways to punish returnees and seek restitution. Their acts of resistance forced returnees to reflect on their violent pasts, and many survivors – either while inebriated (or through feigned inebriation) – engaged in truth telling. In general, survivors' acts of resistance influenced social dynamics in Acholiland and resulted in what I call relative social harmony: many survivors tolerated acts of violence, but at the same time engaged in acts which made ex-combatants' lives unbearable.

For their part, LRA ex-combatants' pasts, which coloured their everyday life in Acholiland, caused them to experience social stigma, judgement and discrimination from survivors. Living at the social margins, and being constantly reminded of experiences they preferred to forget, made it difficult to live a normal life and impacted on their post-conflict relationships and behaviours.⁵⁴ Johan Galtung identifies 12 creative ways of restoring peace after war violence.⁵⁵ In Acholiland, however, it appears that the amnesty process for returnees has not restored peace. Instead, the social dynamics between survivors and returnees resonate with James Scott's description of everyday resistance and weapons of the weak.⁵⁶ Survivors' acts of false compliance, stigmatization and name calling are forms of this everyday resistance in a context where ex-combatants need to reintegrate and survivors have been sensitized, ordered, advised and in some cases incarcerated in order to enforce compliance and ensure the efficacy of the amnesty approach.

My analysis reveals the repercussions of oppressive state-led TJ mechanisms. Whereas ex-combatants preferred to *forget* their violent past, and effectively denied survivors the right to engage with it, survivors used various techniques to focus on the past: constant reminders, revenge and abuse. They confronted ex-combatants with the truth about what had happened and expressed resentment over their suffering and war experiences.

Charles Villa-Vicencio is a key advocate for truth telling in the aftermath of violence.⁵⁷ Yet the extent to which truth telling – raised as it is unofficially in angry, often abusive ways – promoted social harmony in Acholiland was not immediately

53 Personal interviews, 20 February 2018.

54 Ibid.

55 Galtung, supra n 15.

56 James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

57 Charles Villa-Vicencio, 'The Politics of Reconciliation,' in *Telling the Truths: Truth Telling and Peace Building in Post-Conflict Societies*, ed. Tristan Anne Borer (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

clear. Indeed, only survivors appeared interested in making these ‘truth’ utterances, while ex-combatants seemed to be disturbed by them. Survivors also frequently expressed fear and false remorse after making such statements. This leads me to question whether it is important to engage in truth telling as a process of reconciliation, particularly in villages where survivors and ex-combatants already know the truth.

Survivors’ Transitional Justice Mechanisms

In coining the concept of *survivors’ acts of resistance* in a context in which amnestied perpetrators are unremorseful and unwilling to engage with the community regarding past atrocities, I have highlighted both survivors’ agency and the consequences of silencing victims of wartime violence. The amnesty approach in Acholiland amounts to state repression of survivors in the interests of allowing impunity for returned LRA ex-combatants.⁵⁸ Such repression has caused tension.

Scholars recognize the importance of promoting reconciliation and reparation after war violence.⁵⁹ In addition, the UN General Assembly argues for the right to remedies and reparations, citing the five components of restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of nonrepetition.⁶⁰ However, the Ugandan government chose instead to simply grant full amnesty to ex-combatants and reintegrate them with survivors. The amnesty by-laws offered reintegration packages to ex-combatants and protected them against acts of revenge, thus unintentionally reinforcing impunity. As a result, survivors felt angry, intimidated and oppressed, and did not properly heal, engage or come to terms with their past experiences,⁶¹ as intended by the amnesty framework.

My research highlighted that through their acts of resistance, survivors set an impossibly high moral and existential standard for ex-combatants, such that LRA returnees can only reintegrate into the community if they *pe gitimo bal moo* (do no other bad things) and their behaviour is exemplary. But being perfect is impossible for ex-combatants as their very past makes them imperfect. They are imperfect in the present too: unlike survivors, they are rewarded with resettlement packages and are able to construct huts and establish a family, while their atrocious past actions have made many survivors unable to fend for themselves because they have been maimed, disabled and/or orphaned. Returnees are seen as imperfect when they inquire about a lost bicycle, and their behaviour is viewed as *locen*-like if they fight back after their huts have been ‘accidentally’ burnt down – just as they themselves burnt down many huts while in the LRA. It is because returnees cannot avoid being imperfect that they

58 Ibid.; Allen, *supra* n 2; ICTJ, 2009 and 2011, *supra* n 7; Amnesty International, *supra* n 4.

59 Villa-Vicencio, *supra* n 57; Allen, *supra* n 2; Akello et al., *supra* n 25; Annemiek Richters, Cora Dekker and Willem F. Scholte, ‘Community Based Sociotherapy in Byumba, Rwanda,’ *Intervention* 6(2) (2008): 100–116; Galtung, *supra* n 15; ICTJ, 2011, *supra* n 7; Amnesty International, *supra* n 8.

60 Akello et al., *supra* n 25; Amnesty International, *supra* n 8; UN, ‘Guidance Note of the Secretary General: United Nations Approach to Transitional Justice,’ March 2010, https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/TJ_Guidance_Note_March_2010FINAL.pdf (accessed 12 March 2019). The UN General Assembly recognizes TJ as a full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society’s attempt to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation.

61 Amnesty International, *supra* n 8; UN, *supra* n 60; ICTJ, 2011, *supra* n 7.

face considerable challenges. Their very presence is imperfection because they come back with *cen*, which makes the community experience misfortune. They are *locen*, whose mere presence makes the community suffer. In addition, many behave badly due to *cen*. Ex-combatants are prone to quarrelling, fighting, have nightmares and hallucinate. When they display these tendencies, they are seen as destabilizing the peace for which survivors have yearned. Ex-combatants thus experience severe limitations and restrictions on how they can behave and engage with their fellow community members following reintegration.

LRA ex-combatants, in short, cannot live peacefully in Acholiland. Even within the amnesty framework, returnees saw accountability as an obstacle to peace, and threatened survivors with incarceration and continued violence if they had no guarantee of immunity as accorded to them by the African Union's principles on TJ.⁶² This lack of accountability has been a hindrance to returnee reintegration. As a result, neither survivors nor returnees can find peace. In order for returnees to have peace, they need to forget their violent pasts and move on. But for survivors, the returnees' presence is a constant reminder of their violent acts and survivors do everything possible to remind them of their deeds. In this sense, a vicious cycle of remembering, re-enacting and perpetuating violence is created.

Although the amnesty approach aimed to ensure the cessation of armed conflict and bring peace to northern Uganda, the state has only achieved the former, with people in Acholiland returning to their peasant livelihoods. Another key finding of this study is that within the amnesty approach of forgiving ex-combatants and ordering survivors to forget and move on, mercy or forgiveness is expected of survivors. Survivors said that the amnesty by-laws made them live as if in a 'very tight corner,' somewhere between a rock and a hard place. According to them, one cannot express personal feelings to someone who has done 'bad things' and continues to do so.

In effect, the efficacy of offering certificates of forgiveness in order to reinforce the cessation of armed violence depended upon the state's repression and silencing of war victims. This was underscored by the fact that during the early stages of implementing these by-laws, the state security machinery traversed villages, arresting survivors who violated them. Some survivors approached the police to request the release of those incarcerated, whose only crime, in their view, had been reminding the *locen* about their violent past. According to survivors, the local defence forces and the police made the mistake of imprisoning the innocent and leaving free those who had committed the worst crimes. The state-enforced repression of survivors' need to confront returning ex-combatants and openly deal with the past prompted survivors to engage in their own indigenous acts of resistance. For instance, having discovered that the police would not arrest anybody who violated the amnesty by-laws while in a state of inebriation, survivors began regularly attacking LRA ex-combatants when drunk. The returnees were thus confronted with constant accusations and reminders of the past. Furthermore, any attack by an LRA returnee on a drunk survivor would cause all other survivors in the vicinity to rise up in anger. Returnees were thereby forced into remorsefulness and accountability, fleeing the survivors' anger. If ex-combatants feared constant reminders of their violent past, and survivors constantly

62 See, Amnesty International, *supra* n 8; International Peace Institute, *supra* n 7.

reminded them of it, then it could be said that survivors effectively punished returnees. This then is the essence of this article's argument – the importance of memory and the repercussions of survivors' acts of resistance. Memory, I argue, made it precarious for returnees and survivors to forge meaningful social relations and reinforce social harmony.

In sum, survivors' acts of resistance encompassed acts of 'revenge,' false compliance with amnesty by-laws, feigned ignorance and remorse, verbal abuse and public enactment of sorrow and wailing in settings characterized by silencing and repression. Survivors set a high moral standard for returnees by finding other ways to express, remember and remind them of their past violence, so critiquing their very being and making returnees simultaneously uncomfortable, remorseful, accountable and able to reflect on their past. The resistance acts were annoying, indirect and repetitive, sometimes culminating in major psychiatric and psychological distress for ex-combatants.

The war may be over and there is relative social harmony, but there is no peace in Acholiland. Therefore, an urgent question arises: How does one bring about peace in a setting in which survivors and returnees must live together but, in order to coexist, survivors must forget the past and returnees must not be reminded of their acts of violence? Critically examining these social dynamics leads me to call for meaningful ways to promote reconciliation and resilience among Acholi people. As the repressive state amnesty mechanism has created tension in Acholiland between survivors and LRA ex-combatants, I recommend the following:

- Since the amnesty approach neglected survivors, the state needs to engage them, inquiring into and addressing their needs. Key questions include how to reintegrate amnestied ex-combatants: Is it through compensating survivors? Is it through promoting dialogue between survivors and ex-combatants in order to arrive at genuine forgiveness? Is it through resettling LRA ex-combatants in different locations, where survivors are not reminded of their violent pasts in everyday interactions and where returnees are able to forget or conceal them?
- Some LRA ex-combatants mentioned that since having been 'subjected to a lot by survivors,'⁶³ it would be better for them to be punished once and for all. The state could order them to renovate schools and hospitals, repair water sources and dig feeder roads. What is not clear is whether survivors would see these as 'sufficient' acts of punishment for the atrocities committed.
- My ethnographic observations indicate that survivors re-enacted and re-experienced anger over the past and the loss of property. The state could attempt to compensate affected survivors, if only to facilitate social, economic and political repair in Acholiland. Many government-led reconstruction programmes have been implemented in Acholiland, including the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund 1–3, and the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan, but they have been grossly mismanaged. In this regard, another approach specifically targeting survivors could be implemented to ensure that they are compensated.

63 Personal interview, two former LRA captains and a commander, 19 and 21 February 2018.

- Although difficult, and many LRA ex-combatants would be apprehensive about such an approach, community initiatives in Acholiland could link LRA returnees with survivors in constant dialogue and forgiveness seeking. This is a low-cost and practical approach which would enable ex-combatants and survivors to live in harmony – an approach code-named ‘sociotherapy’ and operationalized by Annemiek Richters and colleagues.⁶⁴ This would facilitate what Meredith Martin⁶⁵ calls a democratized process of healing and dealing with the past, one that contributed to reconciliation in South Africa.⁶⁶

CONCLUSION

In this article, I showed that survivors made LRA returnees accountable through their everyday acts of resistance. While the returnees preferred to forget about their violent pasts, the derogatory names that they were called contained descriptions of their violence. Many ex-combatants feared in particular the bitter weeping of young and old women, as well as verbal attacks by inebriated survivors, reminding them of what they had done during wartime.

Despite the amnesty approach, survivors in Acholiland have accessed TJ mechanisms and engaged in truth telling in other ways. Using various methods, survivors have tried to attain what might be impossible through state/nonstate reparation mechanisms in Uganda.

In proposing the concept of survivors’ acts of resistance, I highlighted survivors’ agency. They are not passive subjects who wait for the external, disengaged and repressive state to design and oversee TJ mechanisms in Acholiland. Notably, survivors’ initiatives have been neglected by scholars of TJ, since their indigenous acts are difficult to link with documented methods of restorative and distributive justice, as proposed by Galtung.⁶⁷ What I highlighted in this article could be recognized as local ways of dealing with violence and extreme events. The repertoire of tactics of everyday resistance to the systematic repression of survivors in Acholiland enriches our understanding of everyday life and social dynamics in communities after violence. While other scholars have discussed spirit-mediated ways of dealing with extreme war events, while referring to ‘culture,’ local resources or indigenous approaches,⁶⁸ this article focused on the importance of memory and negotiated social dynamics as people affected by war brutality transition to peaceful coexistence.

64 Richters et al., *supra* n 59; International Peace Institute, *supra* n 7.

65 Meredith Martin, *Coming to Terms: South Africa's Search for Truth* (New York: Public Affairs, 1999).

66 Tristan Anne Borer, ‘Truth Telling as a Peace-Building Activity: A Theoretical Overview,’ in *Telling the Truths: Truth Telling and Peace Building in Post-Conflict Societies*, ed. Tristan Anne Borer (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

67 Galtung, *supra* n 15; *ibid*.

68 See, Victor Igreja, ‘“Why Are There So Many Drums Playing until Dawn?” Exploring the Role of Gamba Spirits and Healers in the Post-War Recovery Period in Gorongosa, Central Mozambique,’ *Transcultural Psychiatry* 40(4) (2003): 459–487.