

Cosmopolitan Warmongering in Uganda

A Discursive Approach to Kony 2012

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Introduction

On 5 April 2012 the US-based NGO Invisible Children (IC) launched their campaign video *Kony 2012* on YouTube and Vimeo, two major video sharing websites. The thirty minute video advocated the arrest and trial of Joseph Kony, commander of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda. Those watching were motivated to 'make him famous' by sharing the video online to an ever expanding audience. The video was supposed to showcase the many violent crimes committed by the LRA against the Acholi community in the northern part of the country over the past twenty years. IC focused mainly on the abduction of children from Acholi villages to serve as soldiers or sex slaves. To help spread the word, viewers were urged to buy an 'action kit' on IC's website, which contained a bracelet to wear and posters and stickers to put up around their hometowns. The final step in IC's campaign was for viewers to get politically involved with the cause by contacting congressmen and push for the arrest of the Ugandan warlord (*Kony 2012*). Indeed, millions did precisely that. They bought the action kits, leading to over \$20 million in sold 'awareness products' and a net income of over \$10 million for the organization at the end of the fiscal year (IC financial statements 2012). They also shared the video: intensive online sharing on social media outlets Facebook and Twitter led to an all-time record. Within a week the video had been viewed seventy-three million times on YouTube and sixteen million times on Vimeo (Rainie et al 2012: 1). Within days the numbers passed the hundred million mark, stagnating at around 115 million, where it stands at the time of writing.

Furthermore, in the wake of the release of *Kony 2012* the United States government announced their continued support in Uganda in apprehending Kony. The US military advisors assisting the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) in their mission to arrest Kony were to remain stationed in Uganda. The video had warned that their support may be pulled out at any time. Another turn of events was the announcement made by several African countries that they were investigating possibilities for joining forces in the 'hunt' for Kony. In September 2012 the African Union (AU) announced it would take over coordination of the mission as a whole. The mission transformed into a regional task force under AU mandate adding to the UPDF troops from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), South Sudan and Central African Republic (CAR). Troop numbers were to grow from approximately 2,500 to 5,000.

During *Kony 2012*'s rise to fame, however, as quickly as viewer numbers rose, critics responded. Parallel to the popularity of the movie, a (mostly online) stream of criticism rejected the narrative proposed by IC (Cavanagh 2012: 1-3). Critics, many of them Ugandan, mostly accused IC of portraying an oversimplified version of the LRA conflict, thereby overlooking the consequences of military action in Uganda. They questioned the organisation's handling of funds, a large part of which is used for making movies and lobbying, rather than on the ground activism (Finnström 2012: 129). Another line of criticism focused on the low threshold of online activism, or 'clicktivism' (Demmers forthcoming: 6-7). In today's internet-propelled society, some argue, supporting a cause by the click of a button is replacing meaningful activism. The low threshold of participation also entails low levels of commitment. The campaign and those it inspired, on the other hand, claimed that the interconnected reality of today 'changes everything' and that Facebook is what brings us all together. *Kony 2012* urged the importance of acting now, as one. The solution to the problem, after all, was clear-cut: arrest Joseph Kony and bring back the children to their parents. How can one argue against that?

While these discussions were mostly held in the 'comments' section of the *Kony 2012* video and elsewhere on the internet, the underlying dynamics of the online debate nevertheless closely resembled current political and academic debates on modern warfare and how to respond to them. From the 1990s onward, academic dialogue was concerned with understanding the dynamics of numerous civil wars, insurgencies and ethnic strife in Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe, which seemed to spontaneously erupt in the post-Cold War period. Mary Kaldor (1999) coined the term 'new wars' to categorize these violent conflicts, which were characterized by intra-state warfare, the deliberate targeting of the civilian population and apolitical goals. International responses to these crises featured more and more robust measures of intervention, a development which eventually culminated in the UN protocol of the *responsibility to protect (R2P)*. Some academics have observed a gradual move towards a situation where the international community has a moral obligation to protect those within the borders of other states (Chandler 2000, 2009; Demmers forthcoming; Dexter 2007; Duffield 2002, 2010). Others, on the other hand, regard R2P as an essential step towards a cosmopolitan community (Kaldor 1999). It is this debate, in which this thesis is positioned.

One of the main issues surrounding the debate on how we understand late modern warfare, however, is that empirical material is often lacking. While most theorists certainly refer to

situations on the ground and the way interventions in the modern age are legitimized, they often limit themselves to highly theoretical, philosophical and political spheres of thought. A drawback of this approach, as both Chandler and Demmers note, is the tendency is to get stuck in dualisms of cosmopolitanism on the one hand and biopolitics on the other (Demmers forthcoming: 7; Chandler 2009: 247). In order to go beyond these mutually excluding dichotomies, then, it is important to carefully study how institutional practices are informed by regimes of truth and dynamics of power. For instance, the novelty of the 'new war' has on multiple accounts been contested by others (Dexter 2007; Kalyvas 2001; Elshtain 2001). Both the practices and underlying causes of war are not unique to the current context. Nevertheless, it can be argued that Kaldor and the debate which followed did touch upon an aspect of current regimes of truth. It showed the dilemma of morally judging war, a departure from Clausewitz' claim that war is the continuation of politics by other means. Kaldor highlighted a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate war, between good war and bad war. The 'new war', in other words, is a way of talking about wars, rather than an actual type of war.

It is precisely the practice of talking, of perceiving and interpreting war, which is relevant to the debate as discourse has an important role to play in the manifestation of institutional practices. The 'new war' is not necessarily a real-world phenomenon. It is a simplified representation of a reality which is far more complex. However, through the power of discourse, people may *perceive* a phenomenon as a 'new war'. Consequently, they may judge it and its actors as criminal and act upon this. Because of these very real consequences it is little surprise that the contest over naming and framing is at the heart of discourse analysis approaches. By looking at both discursive and institutional practices it becomes possible to identify a) which discursive battle is taking place or has taken place and b) which discourse has become manifest in institutional practices.

With this in mind, the *Kony 2012* campaign offers an interesting case study for more empirically oriented research. Its timing, specific use of cosmopolitan discourse and institutionalized events surrounding its release are very open to analysis from multiple disciplines. The aim of this thesis is to give a detailed account of the political functions of the *Kony 2012* discourse. It will attempt to answer the following research questions: a) how are cosmopolitan ideals translated in the framing of the *Kony 2012* narrative? b) How are these frames perpetuated, rejected and interpreted by a plethora of local, national and international actors? c) How, if at all, was the

narrative instrumental in the military practices which followed its release? And finally d) what are the broader social and political implications of these practices?

It will be argued that the *Kony 2012* video presents a simple narrative of the LRA conflict framed as a case of borderland excess with clearly identified perpetrators and victims, which requires humanitarian intervention based on cosmopolitan reasoning. It was indeed instrumental in the legitimization of the institutional practices which followed its release. As such, the video had real consequences on the ground in Uganda, most notably through increased US determination to support a military mission to arrest Joseph Kony and bring him to trial and the takeover of coordination by the African Union (AU) of said mission. It should nevertheless be noted that there are several sides to this coin. While the cosmopolitan message of *Kony 2012* served to increase global awareness for the LRA conflict and strengthen military pressure on Kony and the LRA on the one hand, thereby increasing the chances of his capture and subsequent trial before the ICC, there are negative implications which need to be taken into account. First, the discourse of *Kony 2012* and its subsequent repetition in the international community is a perpetuation of so-called *borderland* imaginaries, upholding the view among western audiences that sub-Saharan Africa is a violent and barbaric part of the world, its inhabitants reduced to predatory perpetrators on the one hand and weak victims lacking agency on the other. Second, the message of *Kony 2012* and its repetition among western audiences has proven to be instrumental in the increased militarisation of Sub-Saharan Africa and the subsequent overseas governing of ungoverned spaces.

The first chapter of this thesis will outline the current theoretical debate on wars of intervention and our understanding of peace, focusing on the dualism between cosmopolitanism and biopower and its translation into discursive and institutional practices. Chapter two lays out the methods used for data collection in Uganda and the Netherlands. The third chapter will then go on to examine the narrative of the *Kony 2012* video from a discursive approach. The fourth chapter deals with the reception of the frame in the Ugandan context. The fifth chapter discusses the military practices which followed in the wake of *Kony 2012* and examines the relation between the narrative and these practices. Finally, chapter six will give an account of the main social and political consequences of the practices laid out in chapter five.

1. THEORETICAL DEBATE

Since the 1990s a growing body of literature has investigated the social and political implications of wars of intervention and the way these wars are legitimized. The current debate, as mentioned earlier, easily leads to dualisms between Kantian notions of universalism and Habermas's cosmopolitan reading of Kant on the one hand and Schmittian notions of the exercise of sovereign power on the other. This chapter will outline this debate, starting with its foundations in Kant's line of thought, most notably presented in his essay on *Perpetual Peace*. After reviewing the foundational ideas for the current debate, more contemporary theorists will be discussed.

1.1 Kant: peace under universal law

Kant proposes that there can only be perpetual peace under the rule of law. In order to progress from the anarchic natural state to perpetual peace, rule of law is essential for people to coexist (Jabri 2007: 72). Within the state and its social contract, the entity charged with upholding laws is the judicial power of the sovereign state, which can enforce laws through its monopoly over the means of violence. Consequently, Kant argues that peace is a *process* rather than an end state and associates it with notions of *progress* and *modernity*. In doing so, he introduces an idea of peace as a state of enlightenment through rule of law. The absence of law as perceived by Kant constitutes the complete opposite (Kant 1795: 17):

When we see the attachment of savages to their lawless freedom, preferring ceaseless violence to a lawful constraint which they might establish, and thus preferring senseless freedom to rational freedom, we regard it with a deep contempt as barbarity, rudeness, and a brutish degradation of humanity.

These dichotomies of barbarity and civility, of lawful and lawlessness, of humanity and inhumanity, will come to form the base of much critique of the neo-liberal project as a neo-colonial project aimed at the governing of others, in particular Duffield's (2002) idea of the global *borderlands*, which will be elaborated on in the next section.

In the natural state of international relations the regulation of behaviour between sovereign states entails the need for a '[f]ederation of free states', a global judicial order (Kant 1795: 16; Jabri 2007: 72). Kant argues that the international sphere without law of some kind equals perpetual war. The very existence of national armies in itself will provoke conflict and the

absence of a judicial power means states have to take this power into their own hands (Kant 1795: 8, 18). To overcome this problem, a global order of peace should regulate relations between states. Kant points out that there should be a safe space where state representatives can cooperate in peace. He maintains that sovereignty is essential for this purpose (1795: 10). In his view, such a 'league' does not need coercion or obligations and that it is important for states not to have their domestic affairs impeded upon. Kant takes the rational human as his ontological centre and assumes that rationality will draw people, even the 'savages' still living in perpetual war, towards this order (1795: 19-20):

[...] If fortune directs that a powerful and enlightened people can make itself a republic, which by its nature must be inclined towards perpetual peace, this gives a fulcrum to the federation with other states so that they may adhere to it and secure freedom under the law of nations.

The order Kant envisions, in other words, will function as an example to other states. These states can join and gradually the league of nations will grow.

Citizens in states of the league of nations enjoy international rights by decree of being born in one of those states. Jabri points out that Kant's concept of international rights are meant for a 'universal community'. This entails that international rights conceive the progress towards perpetual peace in 'universal terms' (Jabri 2007: 74). The ideal of the universal community, in other words, transcends spatial boundaries in the international sphere as the rights extend beyond specific nation states. Issues arise, however, when these rights are not protected by the state. In Kant's vision a global order of peace does not have the power to coerce states into action. The protection of international rights is then left to the states themselves without any means of enforcement from the league. Moreover, absolute state sovereignty entails that other states are also not to intervene in the domestic affairs of states violating international rights. The failure of the impotent League of Nations in stopping global war in the early twentieth century showed that without coercion it can be very difficult indeed to protect human rights. A twentieth century reading of Kant's work by Jürgen Habermas addresses this issue.

1.2 Habermas: cosmopolitan law

In the twentieth century, Habermas set out a vision of a cosmopolitan order in late modernity. Clearly inspired by Kant, he also calls for a judicial order to manage international relations. This

order consists of international institutions which govern a federation of states. In his view, however, a global cosmopolitan order should come with its own set of methods of coercion and obligation. Jabri recognizes three main tasks of international cooperation in Habermas's cosmopolitan law: first, the primacy of the protection of human rights. Second, the protection of these rights should be carried out by international institutions. Third, global systems of communication should ensure that a global political audience is involved in policy legitimation (Jabri 2007: 79). The first two will be discussed in this section as they are clearly related to Kant. Their inception through military action in the name of humanity and the subsequent transcending of state sovereignty, however, is where Habermas clearly deviates from Kant's ideas.

Habermas's analysis of a cosmopolitan organisation of society is much more coercive than Kant's vision. Where Kant regards his league of nations as a collective of enlightened states, reason being the catalyst to progress, Habermas's order comes with the responsibility to actively protect human rights on a global level (Jabri 2007: 83). He argues that a global cosmopolitan order should have military capacity in order to fulfil this duty. Consequently, he observes that state sovereignty can only be an obstacle in this process. Sovereignty offers judicial protection for state agents and may make it impossible to protect universal rights if a state chooses not to accept outside intervention. In Habermas's vision, therefore, '[c]osmopolitan law must be institutionalised in such a way that it is binding on individual governments' (Habermas 1998: 179 in Jabri 2007: 77). The only effective way to regulate international relations is for international institutions to be able to transcend state sovereignty. This makes it possible for international institutions like the UN to form an overarching institution in late modern global politics and put pressure on states if they do not fulfil their obligations to protect human rights. The UN protocol of the *responsibility to protect (R2P)* can also be seen to follow the same ambition. R2P states that "state sovereignty is no longer an argument against external military intervention to protect civilians" (Demmers forthcoming: 4). Warfare according to Habermas is only legitimate if it is instrumental in the protection of human rights. Moreover, military action in this context is considered an instance and therefore validation of cosmopolitan law because it protects the rights of civilians. It is therefore a step in the progress to a cosmopolitan world order. Jabri explains that in doing so, the very act of violence becomes synonymous with peace: '[t]he judgement of law, when enacted globally,

comes to be founded on the moment of violence, is bought into being with the decision to use violence' (2007: 79). As these practices are only cosmopolitan if they are carried out by international institutions like the UN or NATO, wars fought by states on their own account, like the US global war on terror, are therefore not legitimate. The cosmopolitan or humanitarian war, as Jabri points out, blurs the distinction between agents of war and agents of peace (2007: 92). Simultaneously, through his explanation of the humanitarian war, Habermas draws strict boundaries in the act of warfare. In his view, war can be clearly categorized in humanitarian and non-humanitarian war, the first being the legitimate response to human rights crises and the latter an instance of criminality. This distinction between a 'good' and, by implication, 'bad' war is also heavily debated in the current academic context. One of the more radical opponents of humanitarian war is Carl Schmitt.

1.3 Schmitt: the exercise of sovereign power

Those who question the cosmopolitan aims of humanitarian warfare as proposed by Kant and Habermas tend to turn to concepts by Carl Schmitt. Schmitt claims that 'a moment of decision [inaugurates] the power of the sovereign' (Jabri 2007: 84-85). Rather than a democratic decision for the good of mankind, he argues that the power to decide lies with those who are powerful enough to either move international institutions to action or transcend them. The top of the political hierarchy in his system is therefore still the sovereign and not an international institution of peace. The presence of international institutions, no matter their judicial status, remain subject to political decision making on state level. The moment the US decided to ignore the UN and start a war in Iraq would be an example of what Schmitt would call sovereign power. The moment the US decided to invade Iraq was the moment it used sovereign power. However, a problem in Schmitt's reasoning, according to Jabri, is that he extracts all normative reasoning behind the political process. She therefore claims that '[i]t is as such unhelpful in seeking an understanding or the relationship between wars conducted in the name of humanity and the instantiation of law as defined by Habermas and other liberal thinkers' (2007: 86). Jabri certainly makes a strong point by highlighting and questioning the radical theory of Schmitt. However, while the theory in its raw form may be 'unhelpful', it does direct our attention to relations of power in the international context. After all, according to Habermas, humanitarian war is a legitimate course of action in the case of humanitarian crises. Fukuyama seems to sum up the dilemma this highlights when he poses the question "who gets to decide

on whose sovereignty to violate, and on what grounds?" (Fukuyama 2004: 142). Schmitt's theory helps us to understand that this not so easily answered.

Schmitt argues that the sovereign power culminates in a state of exception. A state of exception temporarily suspends law in order to grant more power to the sovereign (De Larrinaga & Doucet 2008: 522). As such, it challenges the Habermasian system by opening up the option for nation states to transcend cosmopolitan law and its institutions. The state of exception cannot be called upon at will, however. Schmitt argues that war is actually about existential threats. A war can be legitimized if it threatens "our" way of life, in other words (Jabri 2007: 85). In security studies the process is known as securitization, a concept which highlights the discursive element of the existential threat (Emmers 2007: 112-113). It describes a speech act as instrumental in framing a situation, event or individual as an existential threat, subsequently leading to an increase in political power. What is essential in this explanation is that the targeted phenomenon is *framed* as an existential threat. Framing, as a discursive practice, subjects the political process to discursive battles, which reveals that in the end sovereignty ultimately lies with the actor with the greatest *power to define*, meaning the power to make others inhabit your story of their reality (Gourevitsch 1998: 48) Consequently, many theorists following Schmitt delved into the murky world of power relations in the international sphere and how they can be analysed through discourse and institutional practice. Many contemporary theorists started combining notions of sovereignty with Foucault's concept of biopower.

1.4 Foucault: biopower

Biopower and biopolitics are generally explained as "the power to make live" (Foucault 2003: 240-247 in De Larrinaga & Doucet 2008: 520). This interesting, yet confusing notion is what Foucault sees as the next step in governing people after sovereign power. While the sovereign enacts the right to kill, biopower is aimed at taking care of people through welfare, healthcare and other institutions designed for the benefit of society. The most important notion of biopower in the current context is that it targets humanity as a whole, unlike the sovereign which targets the body of the individual (De Larrinaga & Doucet 2008: 520). As such, Jabri (2007) points out, in order to make live, a subsequent task of biopower is "the security of the whole from internal dangers" (Jabri 2007: 57). What this entails is that, having the defence of humanity as a target, biopower needs to protect humanity against *inhumanity* and existential threats, the destruction of which "serves the survival of humanity at large" (Jabri 2007: 58-59).

Unlike the collective human, the inhuman and evil are often inscribed upon the bodies of individuals. It is therefore closely related to practices of monstration, which will be discussed later. They can be clearly recognized and their destruction acknowledged (2007: 58-59). Initially, Foucault developed the concept of biopower to explain state behaviour within states, but contemporary theorists like Jabri started applying it to the international sphere, thereby explaining the biopolitical process of inscribing the image of the cultural 'other' upon the bodies of strangers (Jabri 2006: 52). The protection of the human collective from inhuman threats is the most important aspect for the current reading of discourse. How the theoretical ideas mentioned above manifest themselves in discourse and, ultimately institutions, will be discussed below.

1.5 Contemporary critics: discursive approaches to conflict

Contemporary theorists have expressed their concern about the consequences of cosmopolitan grand ideals for the cultural 'other' targeted by humanitarian warfare. The 'other' is what we mean by *them* in us/them discursive dichotomies. In the case of humanitarian warfare, they are either the distant victim of war who has to be rescued or the distant perpetrator of war crimes who has to be punished or defeated. In the study of late modern warfare, the analysis of narratives legitimating humanitarian war, the way they become dominant and their eventual manifestation in institutional practices are especially of interest. To understand the role of discourse we again turn to Jabri, who proposes a discursive approach to violent conflict. She defines discourse as follows (1996: 94-95 in Demmers 2012: 125):

Discourses are social relations represented in texts where the language contained within these texts is used to construct meaning and representation. [...] The underlying assumption of discourse analysis is that social texts do not merely reflect or mirror objects, events and categories pre-existing in the social and natural world. Rather, they construct a version of those things. They do not describe things, they do things. And being active they have social and political implications.

Demmers explains that discourses do not have to be real. They have to be *perceived* as real to be acted upon by people in all layers of society (2012: 125). This agency of discourse to initiate change is informed by Anthony Giddens' theory of the duality of structure.

Giddens claims that neither agency nor structure are prior ontological entities, but that they are mutually constituting and complementing each other. He sees structure and agency continually feeding into and from each other (Demmers 2012: 119). The power to initiate change in his system comes from interaction between the two. Through structuration theory, Giddens explains how gradual changes by agents over time change structural rules. Human beings have agency in that they can either reproduce the social structure they are born into in daily practice practices or diverge (2012: 120). In order to analyse these practices, Giddens argues to look at discourse and institutions. Discourses which divert from the 'standard' will feed into structures and when they become dominant by repetition, they will be reproduced or 'become manifest' in institutional practices (2012: 122). This is the foundation of Jabri's analysis. Jabri adds to Giddens' system that these structures can serve the interest of hegemonic groups to legitimate action in their interests (2012: 121). The power to define, in other words, signifies the power to initiate war. As such, it is interesting to see how the reality of the LRA conflict in Uganda is represented in the *Kony 2012* campaign and how this feeds into existing regimes of truth.

1.6 Borderlands

A theme within discourse analysis proposed by Mark Duffield is the social construction of global *borderlands*, imagined places of constant emergency, barbarity and excess. They are the spatial and cultural context of the 'new war'. Borderlands can be recognized in campaigns by aid organisations, most notably characterized by the image of the scantily clothed African child and its mother in a primitive African village. In the narrative, both the child and its mother are symbols of hardship and misery. Duffield explains however that '[i]n those shifting zones of political instability where we may think the borderlands exist - Sierra Leone, Congo, Kosovo [...] - the situation on the ground invariably proves to be more complex and ambivalent than the images of regression suggest' (2002: 1052). The borderland, in other words, is inscribed upon the bodies of the people inhabiting it. In the international arena borderlands serve the needs of both aid agencies and state agents in that they provide their audience with both *justification* and *legitimation* for humanitarian intervention and war. Moreover, without simplifying the case at hand it would be impossible for the borderland discourse to fulfil its mobilizing function (2002: 1053). What it also represents, however, is a *will to govern* and police the borderlands (2002: 1053; Demmers 2013: 3). The dichotomies upon which this urge to govern is based are distinctly cosmopolitan and modern in nature. They stem from

Enlightenment ideas of rationality and continually juxtapose *our* and *their* way of life. The latter is generally represented as clearly inferior and in dire need of change. In the end, the borderlands are used to legitimate humanitarian intervention, either to secure *our* protection or to alleviate *their* suffering. This crisis of self-reliance is maintained on a discursive level by the “constant rediscovery” of poverty and violence in “underdeveloped worlds”, thereby portraying those living in the global borderlands as “incomplete or lacking the necessary requirements for a proper existence” (Duffield 2010: 61).

First of all, the borderland represents issues such as war, famine, disease and poverty as the ‘[...] failure of modernity’ (Duffield 2002: 1052). Underdevelopment is often considered at fault in these situations, leading to a lack of healthcare, social welfare and security for the state’s citizens. It is, as Duffield notes, an unacceptable means of survival (2010: 68). In the case of violent conflict, borderland violence is generally juxtaposed to ‘our’ violence. The former, characterized by guerrilla warfare, war crimes and extreme forms of violence, is considered lawless, illegitimate and messy, while the latter constitutes a restrained, clean form of warfare (Duffield 2002: 1052-1053; Dexter 2007: 1058). Dexter elaborates on this notion by stating that acts of warfare in these contexts also reinforce the borderland traits of barbarity: ‘[...] it appears that there is a normative distinction between death by machete say, and death by smart bomb’ (Dexter 2007: 1065). The borderland subject, in the end, is represented as the passive victim of all this misery. Borderland victims are typically framed to have no agency in order to change their situation. Initiatives taken by local communities to overcome their problems are as a side-effect often overlooked or neglected (Cavanagh 2012: 3).

Secondly, the borderland, defined by anarchy and underdevelopment, becomes a threat not only to its inhabitants, but also to others. In this reading, the borderland is commonly known as a failed state (Duffield 2010: 56). State failure is often regarded as one of the most pertinent threats to global security (Fukuyama 2004: 125). Not merely because the state is unable to provide for its citizens a minimum of services necessary, but because it is unable to govern its territory and prevent its security to spill over to other states. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 are still the paramount example of the possible outcome of allowing ‘terrorist breeding grounds’ within state territories. Subsequently, US foreign policy against ‘ungoverned spaces’ were set into motion by the Bush Jr. administration. Fukuyama (2004) argues that in an age where non-state actors can get their hands on Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) without due response

from state agents, it is perfectly legitimate to intervene out of self-defence (133). Fukuyama explains that after 9/11 it dawned upon western governments that '[e]vents in distant, chaotic parts of the globe could matter intensely to the United States and other rich and powerful countries' (2004: 126). It is the very image of the borderland: strange, distant lands which could endanger *us*: a very powerful legitimation for intervention. In Foucaultian fashion, the borderlands are biopolitically inscribed upon the bodies of the cultural other, in this case by the image of the '[...] evil African male as vengeful killer and rapist and (much helped by 9/11) the ruthless Islamic extremist [...]' (Demmers 2013: 3; Jabri 2006: 52). The image of the other as enemy on the one hand and passive victim on the other becomes hereby increasingly perpetuated and refined.

Furthermore, Chandler (2006) and Dexter (2007) both identify the new wars discourse as a depoliticization of war (Chandler 2006: 484-485; Dexter 2007: 1066). Chandler points out that Mary Kaldor's definition of the 'new war' leads to a situation in which standard political measures are not capable of granting a solution to widespread human rights violations. It leaves no other choice than to include external actors to achieve peace (2006: 485). Dexter comments on this by stating that as an effect '[r]ather than being linked to wider social and global changes, the belief that conflict results from the criminal intentions of a corrupt few reinforces the idea that new wars are an anomaly, an 'illicit' aberration'' (2007: 1068). Additionally, Chandler argues that Kaldor depoliticizes warfare by 'portraying the intervention (military or otherwise) of Western powers as above politics'. Western powers are assumed to intervene in other states without national self-interests, thereby critically delegitimizing the targeted state's own political process. It also frames an intervention as a policing mission, rather than a war. Consequently, the neutrality of policing opens up a territory for perpetual methods of monitoring and control (2006:485). Nevertheless, western systems of interventions develop sophisticated and powerful metaphors to create monstrous images out of those 'corrupt few'.

1.7 Monstration

The processes of othering and dehumanization aimed at constructing these borderland frames have been subject to analysis by various theorists. Focusing on newspaper headlines, articles and political cartoons, Steuter & Wills (2008; 2009) found that enemy construction in news media is often achieved through (visual) metaphors containing imagery of the enemy as swarms of insects, reptiles and the monstrous. The fear of being overrun, overwhelmed by

waves of homogenous, invisible enemies legitimates their subsequent extermination by western 'hunters' and 'trappers'. In a more recent report, Peter Chambers (2012) conducted a case study of the 'monstration - the making and unmaking of a group or individual as monster' of Abu Musab Al Zarqawi and its political implications (2012: 30). The monster is a being which blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction. Furthermore, its implied existence not only reflects a culture's fears, it also upsets the very laws and boundaries which make up certainties of daily reality (Chambers 2012: 30-31). In doing so, the monster's natural irrationality threatens to break down the rules of rationality so carefully set up by the Enlightenment ideas of cosmopolitanism. Simultaneously, Autesserre points out that simple narratives like *Kony 2012* make the otherwise murky boundaries between perpetrator and victim solid and easily recognisable (2012: 7). African children are portrayed as pure and innocent, the monster as defiled or impure and a threat to their purity.

Essential in Chambers' understanding of the monster is the contrast between 'daily' truths and fact represented for instance in news media and 'nocturnal' fictions which 'feed and bleed into one another' (2012: 34). The building up of the monster image, he argues, is not so much based on *fact* as it is on *storytelling*. Like the theorists mentioned before, Chambers maintains that as long as the narrative *seems* to make sense, its beholders are inclined to support and reproduce it, which allows it to be used for political purposes (2012: 32, 36). The ultimate role of the monster is to be one 'whose killing makes the world a better place' (2012: 37). Consequently, monstration can be a useful political tool for the legitimation of violent action against the person it targets (2012: 32).

While Chambers' outset is to understand the role of the monster as a national enemy who threatens *us*, the practice of monstration can also be recognized in enemy constructions of individuals who may pose no direct threat to 'our' existence at all, yet still warrant similar extraordinary measures to be taken. The naming and framing of Joseph Kony in the *Kony 2012* video reveals very similar ways of storytelling, the main difference being that the focus lies with protecting others, rather than ourselves. Chambers' monstration can be a useful discursive tool, then, to further examine the aforementioned 'will to govern the borderlands'. Humanitarian warfare becomes an agent of change, then, capable of conflict resolution and transformation and therefore legitimate.

It stands out that Chambers and other contemporary theorists like Finnström (2012) seem to move towards the idea of the fantastical, magical and nocturnal as informing and guiding institutional practices in their analyses. Finnström perceives *Kony 2012* as a 'magical master narrative' which is being repeated over and over again by the IC lobby, thereby creating the dichotomized image of Joseph Kony and the LRA on the one hand as villains and the 'good guys' who can do no wrong on the other. As a result, 'Euro-American imaginations' legitimate 'the magic of global war' (2012: 128-129), wars fought to save distant, supported by narratives which have been turned to fiction, rather than simplified. In doing so, Chambers and Finnström point out the power of human imagination and draw attention to the formation of these constructs. Nevertheless, it is important to realize that these analyses themselves walk a very thin line on the boundaries between fact and fiction, boundaries which they, intentionally or not, blur. Stating that a representation of a conflict and the crimes committed within it are fictions does not undo horrific acts of war which actually occur.

2. METHOD

For this thesis data was collected in northern Uganda and Kampala using semi-structured and conversational interviews and document research. The method used was adopted from Dvora Yanow's interpretative policy analysis (2000). Yanow lists interviews, observation and document analysis as central to this type of qualitative research, the central question being: "[h]ow is the policy issue being framed by the various parties to the debate?" (2000: 11, 31). Starting from documentary research, the researcher attempts to map different groups of actors called "interpretive communities" whom share similar understandings on the policy in question (2000: 10). His task then, is to map these communities and attempt to understand their different views and show how they relate to each other.

Yanow's interpretive policy analysis method was useful because the case of the *Kony 2012* video and campaign features a fairly limited plethora of categories of actors involved or affected by it. The main actors in this context are Invisible Children and other (I)NGOs working with Ugandan war victims or the LRA conflict in general, academics, local populations in northern Uganda, Ugandan news media, the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF), the Ugandan government (UG), the International Criminal Court (ICC), AFRICOM and the United States government. Furthermore, the *Kony 2012* video supposes a certain security policy to be the solution to the problems it addresses, namely a military mission to arrest Joseph Kony and end the LRA. It can be argued that the video, campaign and mission can all be interpreted either as promoting a policy or as a policy in itself. Furthermore, as a tool of data collection, conversational interviewing offers more flexibility and options to gain further insight in the subject's personal opinions and the context in which they are formed. Surveys would have been useful to gauge the spread of the *Kony 2012* campaign, but would hardly add anything else. A final reason to choose this method was because it relies heavily on contacts of the interviewed subject. At the end of each interview I would ask whom I should interview next. This was a useful approach to gain access to more sources.

2.1 Sample

The interviewed sample consisted of ten villagers in Awach sub-county in the Gulu district and political, army and news actors based in Kampala and the Netherlands. Interviews were translated by Victor Oloya, a local research assistant and interpreter, and recorded using a digital voice recorder. They lasted from just over thirty minutes to two hours, depending on

time available and wordiness of subjects. All interviews were transcribed in Microsoft Word documents for archiving and analysis.

All subjects from Awach were at one point abducted by the LRA and served in its ranks during different periods in history. Three subjects were female, the others male, their ages ranging from twenty-five to forty-two. This sample was chosen for several reasons. First, as a random sample of northern Ugandans, the sample was interesting to gauge the spread of the *Kony 2012* campaign. Secondly, their personal involvement in the conflict made them very interesting for this project. The campaign and video, after all, were geared towards the rescue of these same individuals. Thirdly, their current role as northern Ugandans in a peaceful context enabled them to reflect on the necessity of foreign military assistance. Every individual in this sample was interviewed using the same questionnaire, which was at one point expanded to include issues of victimhood in the current context. Interviews in Awach were not only recorded by voice recorder, but also by written notes. As the project progressed, note-taking became less detailed as answers became more predictable and the lack of eye contact during note-taking more noticeably disruptive of the flow of interviews.

The actors in Kampala were interviewed on a case-by-case basis. As every actor had his own area of expertise, it made more sense to take advantage of their specific knowledge besides general questions relating to the *Kony 2012* campaign and the military mission to arrest Joseph Kony. Furthermore, at the time of interviewing, events in Central African Republic affected the mission. Questions relating to this situation and how it would affect the mission were therefore included in interviews. These actors were included in the sample for their very specific knowledge and perspective on the *Kony 2012* campaign, the Ugandan context and its meaning in international circles. Questionnaires were drawn up ad hoc and consisted of a general outline of topics to be discussed, rather than a strict list of questions. No notes were taken during interviews as this would disrupt the interview, except to write down telephone numbers of interesting contacts. These interviews were held in English.

Finally, a series of actors in the Netherlands was interviewed. These interviews were carried out by L. Gould, PhD at the Centre for Conflict Studies at Utrecht University, the Netherlands. Besides this thesis, the subject matter and data for this thesis will culminate in a co-written journal article. As we are sharing sources, Gould's data is included with her consent. This group

of actors include academics, journalists, NGO staff and ICC staff. The actors were of interest either because of their expert knowledge or because their profession was closely linked to IC. They were interviewed during one on one conversations by phone, Skype and informal meetings. Depending on the actor's nationality interviews were conducted in Dutch or English. There was no need for an interpreter. Interactions were both recorded using a voice recorder and hand-written notes. They were later transcribed in the respective language in which they were conducted. Any translation from Dutch to English used in this thesis is my own.

It must be noted that the role of the interviewer in these one on one interviews may influence results using this technique. When interviewing local populations in remote areas who are not used to being interviewed, my obvious external roots may have influenced some answers. To minimize this effect, interview topics and questions were carefully formulated and cross-checked with Victor. The fact that he translated my questions, thereby acting as a conduit, seemed to put interview subjects at ease. Subtle control questions were used to double check certain answers, in particular when gauging opinions on western intervention in African countries. Victor advised against using a more blunt approach, namely by directly asking the subject if he or she felt there was a 'right', and by implication wrong, answer to a given question. He feared this would damage our report with the local population. Victor himself was recommended by Utrecht University PhDs T. Hollander and L. Gould, who had worked with him before. As a former LRA abductee and having years of experience as a research assistant, Victor was able to set a pleasant interview setting and defused multiple situations where subjects became emotional. His assistance in northern Uganda has been invaluable and his presence may have compensated for my 'western-ness'.

3. FRAME ANALYSIS AND MONSTRATION OF KONY 2012

In order to understand how cosmopolitan ideals are translated to contemporary discursive practices and frames, it is important to submit the *Kony 2012* campaign video to a close reading. A useful method to dissect mobilisation efforts by NGOs, government and other organisations is by using Benford and Snow's collective action frames (2000). They identify three core frames used to move their audience to action: diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing. The frames explain which issue the organisation is addressing, how it should be resolved and send out a call to action respectively. Additionally, it opens the *Kony 2012* narrative up to further investigation. Practices of monstration and images of borderland violence pervade throughout the frames, translating cosmopolitan reasoning to discourse, obscuring the political and emphasising the moral. However, by highlighting these practices, we can uncover more than just the mobilizing message of the movie: it directs our attention to the potential *political* use of the narrative. This paradox of carefully obscuring the political on the one hand and simultaneously using the narrative for political purposes on the other, is part and parcel of *Kony 2012* and highly significant for our discussion of this construct.

3.1 Diagnostic frame

A *diagnostic* frame establishes the issue which needs to be resolved. It does so first of all by identifying the victim and emphasising his or her victimhood. Benford and Snow call this an *injustice* frame (2000: 615-616). In *Kony 2012* victimhood is clearly inscribed upon the bodies of the Acholi community of northern Uganda, made manifest in Jacob Acaye, a former child soldier in the ranks of the LRA. Acaye is introduced as "Jacob, our friend in Africa" through a series of short video clips and photographs on a Facebook profile page. Scrolling through the *timeline* the viewer is presented with a familiar lay-out of a life history which goes back to 2003, when Russell met Jacob "in very different circumstances. He was running for his life" (*Kony 2012*). The narrative moves from Facebook to Google Maps zooming in to Gulu Town in northern Uganda to finally presenting footage of Acaye as a young boy in 2003. The young African child tells the story of how he witnessed his brother being killed by the LRA. The smooth, well-known world of digital social media suddenly fades away to confront the viewer with a rediscovery of the borderlands. The viewer literally dives face first into an alien world. The footage, shot at night and supported by off-camera lighting, creates a dark and ominous image of Gulu Town. Without explanation, the movie shows impressions of the so-called "night

commuter” phenomenon in northern Uganda: during periods of LRA violence, children from remote villages often travelled to communal trading centres such as Gulu Town to spend the night as these places were safer from attacks and abduction (Allen & Vlassenroot 2010: 189). Clips of local Ugandans emerging from the darkness are accompanied by children talking about their fear of being abducted by the rebels. Russell, a white Caucasian male from California, represents the viewer’s astonishment at this senseless misery. At the sight of a room filled with sleeping children he exclaims: “if that happened one night in America, it would be on the cover of *Newsweek*” (*Kony 2012*). The perceived absence of modern institutional protection, either by police or through social watchdogs like independent media, combined with the image of the African other, constitute and complement the borderland image. It not only emphasises the victimhood of the other, it binds the particular narrative and those inhabiting it to the borderland.

The representation of the Ugandan victims as passive and lacking agency is a second part of the diagnostic frame. The narrative constantly juxtaposes notions of *us* and *them*, where the former are always in a position of power and agency while the latter are not. This is mostly recognizable when Acaye, after telling the story of his brother’s death, breaks down in tears. He is immediately comforted by Russell, who tells him “it’s okay” (*Kony 2012*). He follows by elaborating on his moral urge to do *something* and promises the young boy that “we are going to stop them”. *We* in this case refers to Russell, other members of Invisible Children and the globalized audience they are trying to reach. Throughout *Kony 2012*, the viewer is promised that “[...] if we succeed, we change the course of human history” and “[...] what we do or don’t do, will affect every generation to come” (*Kony 2012*). The power to initiate change in the distant borderlands, in other words, lies with *us*. Ugandans, on the other hand, remain helpless victims awaiting Kony to be brought to justice by western agents of peace.

Secondly, and perhaps more important, the diagnostic frame identifies who or what is to blame for the issue. Through *adversarial* framing an actor is blamed for the situation and subsequently represented as an enemy (2000: 616). This is where monstration as a practice becomes manifest in discourse. The monster in *Kony 2012* is Joseph Kony, top commander of the LRA and wanted by the ICC for numerous war crimes and crimes against humanity including rape, murder, sexual slavery and the forced conscription of child soldiers. The diagnostic frame is introduced in one of the most controversial scenes of the movie where Russell explains to his 4 year old son

Gavin the essence of the LRA conflict. Kony is “the bad guy” who abducts people “and makes them shoot and kill other people” (*Kony 2012*). The overly simplistic narrative of good vs. bad, accompanied by pictures of Kony and Jacob Acaye juxtaposed side by side, seems a fitting explanation for a four-year-old or perhaps a superhero movie. However, the relative lack of public awareness of the LRA conflict before the release of *Kony 2012* meant that the explanation is also aimed at educating viewers. The monster is constructed as in a fairy tale: a static, one-dimensional representative of the dark side of human existence.

Through linking and naming the image is then expanded: Kony abducts children, forces them into the ranks of the LRA as soldiers or sex slaves and forces them to murder their parents and mutilate people (*Kony 2012*). The compound image which is formed becomes all the more powerful for two reasons: first of all, the monster’s cultural role “[...] is loaded with the full weight, colours, and textures of the phantasms of an invested culture” (Chambers 2012: 36). Kony is not just an enemy of local children in Uganda, he is also a monster to his western viewers. The crimes committed feature taboo subjects such as sexual slavery and murder. Moreover, they are directed at children. The moral outrage resulting from this notion is brought home when Russell mentions that “Kony abducts children just like Gavin” (*Kony 2012*). By relating the horror of abduction to his own son Russell directs the threat of Kony to a representative of *us*, yet the face just given to evil personified, it seems, is restricted by spatial boundaries. Gavin is safe thanks to being born in a different part of the world. The narrative juxtaposes the safety of modern western society to the African borderland, where warlords who abduct children force them to carry out the most heinous of crimes can roam free.

Russell’s mentioning of his son in this context is accompanied by the visual re-imagining of a Ugandan boy being dragged out of his bed at night by a faceless assailant. The slow-motion sequence, in which the boy screams but makes no sound, signifies the renewed experience of highly emotional events (*Kony 2012*). It is a quite literal manifestation of the nocturnal, nightmarish world, a collective social sphere where monsters roam and lift children from their beds while they sleep. Schröder and Schmidt (2001) would argue that the power of these performances lies first and foremost with the violent action. Such “violent imaginaries” are instrumental in legitimating violence in that “[t]here exists no more important resource for an ideology of violence than the representation of past violence, of former dead, former loss and former suffering” (2001: 8). Violent imaginaries generally emphasise either *our* suffering at the

hand of an enemy or *our* victory over an enemy. *Kony 2012* contains several scenes which make use of this “[...] performative quality” of violence (2001: 5). An example is a short slideshow of victims of the LRA, their lips and ears cut. The emphasis on the violent suffering of these victims reduces them to just that: suffering victims. Schröder and Schmidt argue that being confronted with these violent images more easily presents violence as just conduct against the perpetrators, in this case Kony and the LRA. In other words, violent imaginaries, through their representation of violence subsequently work towards the legitimation of violence as accepted social conduct.

A final aspect of Kony’s villainous portrayal is the depoliticization of the LRA conflict. Russell claims: “as if Kony's crimes aren't bad enough, he is not fighting for any cause, but only to maintain his power. He is not supported by anyone and has repeatedly used peace talks to re-arm, again and again” (*Kony 2012*). In doing so, Kony is accused of committing senseless violence: violence aimed at self-preservation or enrichment and resulting in destruction. This is usually juxtaposed to political violence, which insinuates that violent behaviour is an outcry for help, attention or dissatisfaction with a regime. It explains the difference between a “freedom fighter” and a “terrorist”. This discourse, which is also adopted by the ICC, has several consequences, as Adam Branch (2007) points out: “The LRA is reduced to a criminal group; the Acholi peasantry are turned into innocent, passive victims; and the ICC itself, aligned with the military force of the Ugandan government, becomes the exclusive interpreter and enforcer of justice – the judge, police and jailer” (190). Consequently, Kony and the LRA are denied any political relevance, thereby denying the existence of structural issues in Uganda which may have led to the rise of the movement in the first place (Branch 191). The diagnostic frame of *Kony 2012*, then, proposes a discourse in which Kony is reduced to a monster, deserving of destruction.

3.2 Prognostic frame

A *prognostic* frame presents a solution or plan of action to tackle the problem introduced in the diagnostic frame (Benford & Snow 2000: 616). In the case of *Kony 2012* it means the question of how to get rid of the monster which has been created. The solution is clearly stated by Russell, his son Gavin and ICC chief prosecutor Louis Moreno Ocampo: Joseph Kony must be stopped. The only way to arrest Kony, the movie argues, is through military action by the UPDF, backed by the 100 US military advisors who have been stationed in Uganda since late 2011 (*Kony 2012*).

Finnström (2012) sums up the prognostic frame adequately in his study of IC and their message: “[o]nly with US military assistance can LRA leaders, indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for war crimes and crimes against humanity, be apprehended” (2012: 129). The story warns that the military advisors assisting in the mission may be pulled out “at any time”, urging the viewer to act now, before it’s too late. The way to make sure this does not change, the video argues, is to “make him famous”. Kony’s name and criminal record should become “a household name”, thereby pressuring governments to act (*Kony 2012*).

The military advisors themselves remain relatively obscure in *Kony 2012*. Other than the notion of their existence and the performed celebration by the IC staff of their deployment, the narrative explains very little about their role in the conflict, their tasks or their involvement in actual fighting. They are, however, clearly identified as agents of peace. They are sent in “because the people demanded it. Not for self-defence, but because it was right” (*Kony 2012*). Their presence, moreover, is considered pivotal in the development of the conflict. If they leave, *we* have failed and Kony can continue his rampage without due trial. The advisers have another interesting role in the narrative of *Kony 2012*: they set in motion the “transmutation” (Chambers 2012: 37) of Kony as a monster. Chambers (2012) claims that monsters go through transmutations as they develop through news media articles, official statements and propaganda. Directly after the movie shows the euphoric reaction of IC staff members to the deployment of the advisers, a message appears that Kony has learned of the US involvement and will “change his tactics” to avoid capture (*Kony 2012*). Soon after this message, it becomes clear that “he’s invisible; Joseph Kony is invisible” and *we* have to find him (*Kony 2012*). Like Chambers’ study of Al-Zarqawi, Kony becomes a spectral presence (2012: 40). Interestingly, when the advisers were deployed in 2011, the UPDF had already spent years trying to find him and had not succeeded. There is no real reason for the narrative’s claim that Kony “changed tactics” to be true. He was “invisible” already. The fact that he is portrayed as being ‘out there’ and praying on the innocent, however, justifies and legitimates the presence of the advisers. Through being a technologically superior army to the UPDF they are framed as the missing link in the military mission to find Kony.

Military action against the LRA has a long, complex and troubled history. Throughout the conflict, Operations North in 1991, Iron Fist in 2002 and Lightning Thunder in 2008, the last of which was logistically supported by the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) (Allen & Vlassenroot

2010: 1), have not been able to root out the LRA. The LRA consistently outmanoeuvred UPDF troops or escaped attacks, after which they would increase their attacks on the civilian population. During missions North and Iron Fist the UPDF herded northern Ugandans into camps where many people reportedly died (Ssenyonjo 2005: 417). A humanitarian disaster developed when the number of IDPs in camps rose steeply in 1996, a result of new security policy against the LRA. The number of IDPs reached a peak in 2006, when approximately 1.8 million civilians were housed in camps: over eighty per cent of the Acholi population (IDMC 2012: 3; Nannyonjo 2005: 478). The overcrowded camps lacked food, hygiene and security, leading to 1,000 excess deaths per week (Mwenda in Allen & Vlassenroot 2010: 56). Those who were not in camps were often assumed to be members of the LRA and subsequently arrested or killed by UPDF soldiers. At the same time, the camps were poorly protected from LRA attacks. According to Branch, “[i]n 2003, one camp of over 50,000 people was being protected by 45 irregular militia, while another camp of 15,000 was being protected by only 12”. As a result, the IDPs were easy targets for the LRA (Branch 2007: 181). The consecutive failure of these missions over the years and the resulting increase in LRA hostilities after each attempt have caused numerous civilian casualties. It should make one careful to promote yet another military solution to the LRA problem.

The *Kony 2012* narrative, however, dismisses peaceful approaches as a solution. Moreno Ocampo and Russell both argue that Kony has used multiple peace talks to rearm and resume hostilities, insinuating that it is useless to try and reason with him (*Kony 2012*). IC’s support for a military mission can also be identified in how it relates to its constituency: they are framed as “[...] an army of young people [...]”, who “will not stop, will not fear” and “will fight war”. The paradoxical message of forming an army to fight war seems to be taken directly from Habermas’ ideas of cosmopolitan law as mentioned before: war in the name of humanity constitutes just war. In one scene, a crowd of activists are shown standing in Washington wearing army green shirts with American M4 rifles depicted on them. They stand in formation and collectively raise their fingers in a peace sign (*Kony 2012*). Taken with IC’s slogan *stop at nothing* the narrative of *Kony 2012* implies a definite and clear promotion of the picking up of arms in a violent campaign against Joseph Kony and the LRA. Because the waging of war in this case is framed as a humanitarian effort to bring children home to their parents and

delivering justice to countless victims, violence is not only presented as acceptable, it is the only conduct that makes sense.

3.3 Motivational frame

The *motivational* frame constitutes a call to action (Benford & Snow 2000: 617). It is a final push towards collective action, featuring notions of collective identity, agency and vocabularies of “severity, urgency, efficacy and propriety” (2000: 617). The motivational frame of *Kony 2012* features mostly the first two. The severity of the issue has already been established in the diagnostic frame, through frames of victimhood and monstration: the viewer is reminded constantly the severity of Kony’s crimes and the implied need to stop him. A sense of urgency is translated by the temporary boundaries set throughout the video: the video itself will “magically” (Finnström 2012: 128) expire after 2012, the US military advisors may be pulled out “at any time” and “time is running out” (*Kony 2012*). Set against a backdrop of groups of clips of young activists running through metropolitan cities it is evident that *we* have already started to do something, urging the viewer to join.

This brings us to the main function of the motivational frame, namely to build up a collective identity, a *we*, which is distinctly western, modern and cosmopolitan in its ideals. Cosmopolitan notions are present in the idea of the interconnected world of Facebook and the internet, which transcend spatial boundaries and allow instant communication. It implies that, through the far and wide spread of the internet, suffering never goes unnoticed. In turn, perpetrators should never go unpunished. The difference with Kant’s vision is, however, that in the world IC constructs, the way to peace is not through rules and regulation. On the contrary, the depoliticization of conflict moves, as Demmers (forthcoming: 7) states, “the location of politics [...] to the moral and personal realm”. In order to be politically active, then, all the viewer has to do is push a button, spread the word on Facebook and order the IC “action kit” (*Kony 2012*). The targeted audience can be involved in the destruction of a monster from the safety of their own homes. In this context peace becomes “[...] consumption good – bought on impulse – and a means to ‘flatter ourselves’” (forthcoming: 7).

Furthermore, agency is ascribed solely to this group. In *Kony 2012* IC is represented not only by Russell and his son, but also by its activists. The movement is personified in the movie by groups of young metropolitan adults, putting up posters, demonstrating or speaking in public

about the Ugandan cause. They repeat the message of IC, that what we do in life “defines us” and that we have the power to end the war in Uganda (*Kony 2012*). A tremendous amount of agency is ascribed to these youngsters, from wearing a t-shirt to the comforting of Ugandan victims to changing “the course of human history. [...]” (*Kony 2012*).

3.4 Analysis

In the end, the *Kony 2012* narrative sends out a simple but powerful message. The narrative contains a detailed account of borderland violence, bizarreness and victimhood. It directs the viewer’s attention to the cause of this situation: the monster, a fictional compound of associations, crimes and horrors. The way to progress the borderland to a more familiar, modern setting is straightforward: destroy the monster. The simplicity of the narrative, furthermore, easily makes us distinguish between us and them, where *they* can be either victim or perpetrator, either to be saved or defeated by *us*.

In doing so, it becomes clear that the transnational *Kony 2012* narrative is fed by and feeds directly into existing late modern systems of knowledge based on the misery of the distant ‘other’, neo-liberal western superiority and a will to police the borderlands. It attempts to remove spatial boundaries by identifying the borderless sphere of the internet as universal and by occupying it as a base of operations. This renders warfare both distant and proximate, resulting in performances of violence and suffering to be experienced by observers in their homes. Furthermore, technologies of instant communication allow to not only reach out, but also to interact and to build social identities.

Simultaneously, it targets the global borderland, a clearly identifiable, and therefore bordered, imagined sphere of excess, biopolitically inscribed upon the docile bodies of its inhabitants (Jabri 2006: 52). These individuals are robbed of self-determination and agency, expected to collectively suffer in silence as a homogenous mass until they are (re)discovered and rescued by agents of peace. The power to define, then, rests in the hands of the storyteller’s ability to make others inhabit his or her story about *their* reality (Gourevitsch 1998: 48). What the discourse of *Kony 2012* shows is that with humanity placed firmly at the centre of a simple narrative, fighting and ultimately destroying the inhuman becomes a universal and moral responsibility. Paradoxically, it also becomes politically active because of it. Consequently, the performative

function of violence (Schröder & Schmidt 2001: 5) is taken at face value and moral cosmopolitanism attempts to dominate the politics of intervention.

The realities on the ground in Uganda and the dynamics of the LRA conflict are obviously far more complex. When child soldiers are involved, who are forced to fight government soldiers, a line between perpetrator and victim cannot be so easily drawn. Similarly, the promoted solution to the Ugandan problem was not considered as straightforward as the movie may have depicted. This discursive battle, the contestation of the frames in *Kony 2012* will be outlined in the next chapter.

4. RECEPTION OF THE KONY 2012 NARRATIVE

This chapter is informed first and foremost by first hand interview data. When the *Kony 2012* movie was released online, it gave rise to a plethora of discourses concerning not only Invisible Children and the campaign itself, but also larger issues of othering and the regional task force to arrest Joseph Kony. Following Yanow's method of interpretive policy analysis, the main discourses and discussions which arose in the wake of *Kony 2012* will be mapped. An important aspect of this analysis is the question of the political economy of the *Kony 2012* narrative. The first point made will be that both those who supported and those who denounced the movie were quite firm in pointing out that the narrative of *Kony 2012* paints an incorrect picture of the current reality. Nevertheless, certain actors still argue that the movie is a good thing, regardless of being a-historic. It is interesting to see, then, what these actors had to gain by "jumping on the bandwagon" of *Kony 2012* (Finnström 2012: 132).

It is important to point out that while *Kony 2012* gained massive attention in the west, spread of the movie in Uganda, northern Uganda in particular, was much more marginal. This is obviously due to the lack of broadband internet connections in northern Uganda, particularly in the more remote regions. Owning a solar panel in the remote parishes is considered a luxury and is mainly used for charging cell phones, not for downloading multimedia. Instead of using alternative channels to educate local communities about their intentions, IC put little effort in spreading the movie in Uganda, unlike the country-wide screening tour in the US accompanying the release of *Kony 2012*. In the end, only a small percentage of the Acholi population in northern Uganda was able to see the movie. Those that missed the two organised screenings in northern Uganda were out of luck. This was reflected in interview data in Awach sub-county: none of the interviewed subjects had seen *Kony 2012*. Moreover, out of the ten subjects interviewed, five had never heard of the movie while four had never heard of IC. Those who had heard of *Kony 2012* knew little more, other than their awareness of its existence: they learned about it on the radio or knew someone who had seen it in nearby Gulu Town, where broadband internet is more widely available. One subject had heard about the controversy the following the movie but was unsure of the underlying reasonsⁱ. Overall, however, it is safe to say that the interviewed subjects had no clue as to what *Kony 2012* was about or what IC was trying to achieve with it. This should be taken into account for the remainder of this thesis, because a) it entails that a local reaction to the *Kony 2012* campaign is difficult to gauge and b) it

highlights how a transnational narrative can target an entire population without their knowledge of its existence. The power to define, at least during the making and release of *Kony 2012*, was completely in the hands of IC: by overlooking local populations in northern Uganda they were able to mould the narrative the way they wanted and make these same populations inhabit this narrative.

4.1 Unanimous: this is not northern Uganda

Most subjects interviewed in Uganda who had seen the *Kony 2012* campaign movie, whether they were the official spokesperson for the UPDF or a critical journalist, shared the same opinion: the *Kony 2012* movie portrays an incorrect image of northern Uganda in the current context. This is also one of the main points of criticism in the international sphere after *Kony 2012* was released. The video uses footage from 2003 to show the effects of the LRA conflict in Uganda, presenting northern Uganda as a region torn by war. The current situation is very different, however. The LRA was driven out of Uganda in 2006 and northern Uganda has experienced a peaceful period of rebuilding and growth (Allen & Vlassenroot 2010: 20-21; Mwenda 2013). Col. Felix Kulayigye, the official UPDF spokesperson at the time, suggested that IC add a disclaimer to their video, indicating that the material they are using is old (NTV Uganda 2012). The current spokesperson, Lt. Col. Paddy Ankunda, repeats Kulayigye's criticism:

They used old material to explain the current situation [...] it could have also created an impression on the security situation in Uganda. [...] The towns in that part of the country are growing once again, they are developing once again. There is peace, total peace, of course apart from a few conflicts here and there over land and settlement and all that. But there is peace. ⁱⁱ

Those in support of IC like the UPDF, ICC and several INGOs nevertheless tend to emphasise that the movie gives an accurate account of what happened in the past and that it explains why Joseph Kony must be arrested.^{iii iv v} Otim: "[...] it is part of a reality, it happened. And the fact [is] that the LRA are still committing crimes elsewhere, you know?"^{vi}

4.2 Local responses: Kony 2012 is unnecessarily hurtful to local communities

The essence of this discourse is that in their quest to make a warlord famous, IC's narrative made old fears and painful memories resurge. This discourse was prevalent among those who

had seen *Kony 2012* during the screening in Lira organised by African Youth Initiative Network (AYINET), a grassroots NGO on 13 March 2012. Lira, AYINET's base of operations, has a large community of former victims, who were at one point abducted by the LRA or suffered from the attacks by the rebel army. When news of the campaign reached the town and surrounding parishes through news radio, information streams were often unclear. Victor Ochen, director of AYINET, was witness to the widespread rumours which spread through the radio networks. Because radio show hosts did not know exactly what to make of the *Kony 2012* video, different interpretations were sent out to the communities. It led to three prevailing rumours: a) Kony has been arrested, b) Kony has returned to Uganda and c) IC has brought a lot of money to help those in need in northern Uganda^{vii}. Ochen and AYINET decided to organise a screening in their hometown, planning to go around northern Uganda to show the movie to the people of northern Uganda. According to Ochen, a mass of 35.000 people showed up to watch the documentary. Ochen's attempt to bring the movie to the people, involve them in the debate and show them how they were being targeted in IC's campaign had unforeseen consequences. Reactions to the movie were so emotional that the NGO decided not to continue with the tour they had planned as it caused too much grief^{viii} (Quinn 2013). The screening was halted when people started throwing rocks at the screen.

Visitors felt that IC's plan of "making Kony famous", including the merchandise used to achieve this goal, had too much positive connotations to it. At the memory of IC activists wearing *Kony 2012* t-shirts, Ochen quotes one of the villagers: "[...] why do you put on this t-shirt, yet I am suffering? Why do you celebrate a terrorist?"^{ix} The visual metaphor of the *Kony 2012* t-shirts, posters and flags used to spread awareness of Kony were met with confusion, hurt and violence towards the movie and IC. The metaphoric entrapment the strong image set out to achieve failed to reach its goal in the local sphere. Metaphoric entrapment occurs when "a concept is understood so thoroughly and consistently in terms of a particular metaphor that it doesn't make sense in any other terms" (Steuter and Wills 2008: 15). One month later a second screening was organized by IC in Gulu. Viewers complained about similar issues as they did in Lira. The screening ended in a riot leaving one dead and many injured (Okumu 2012). All in all, this discourse reframes *Kony 2012* as glorifying Kony rather than exposing him as a criminal, thereby ignoring emotional grievances and traumas.

4.3 *The other local discourse: support for a military mission*

It is interesting to note, however, that local community members who had not watched *Kony 2012* generally agree on the prognostic frame put forward by IC, namely to arrest Joseph Kony. One exception notwithstanding, all subjects thought that it was important that Joseph Kony is arrested and that the only way to achieve this goal is a military mission. Molly, who was given to an officer during her time with the LRA, states:

He [Kony] must be punished, because a lot of people lost their lives during the war. A lot of children were abducted and they were killed [...] [if] they were there [*sic*], now, maybe they could have been educated^x

Molly explains that some people want Kony dead and others want him imprisoned. In doing so, she mirrors the sample taken from this community: about half of the interview subjects thought that Kony should receive the death penalty, the other half preferred a prison sentence.^{xi} Those who wanted Kony dead often related this to his spiritual powers. Kony claims to be a spirit medium. He talks to multiple spirits who help him plan ahead. Many of his former combatants believe that these spirits help him predict the future, especially in military situations. They tell him when the LRA will be attacked so that they can move away from their base.^{xii} The only way to truly get rid of him, they claim, is to kill him; otherwise he might return.^{xiii} Furthermore, these local individuals generally preferred the help of external powers over their own army, the UPDF. Most interviewed subjects were aware of the ongoing mission to arrest Kony and supported it.

The help of the American advisers was welcomed by most. Richard, a former LRA combatant, does not believe the UPDF is capable of arresting Kony as Kony knows the weakness of the UPDF. If other parties join the mission they can use different tactics to attack the LRA, Richard says.^{xiv} This focus on other ways of fighting the LRA is heard more often during interviews. Most subjects assume that the US soldiers participate in fighting, however, and this leads them to believe that they will use advanced technological weapons to defeat the rebels. The overall opinion of the American presence is positive.

It seems clear, then, that these individuals are likely to support the actions IC sets out to achieve. They mimic IC in calling for military action with external help, often based on the fact that Kony abducts children and forces them to fight. It shows that the problem with *Kony 2012*'s

narrative lies first and foremost with its portrayal of the conflict and its victims and the way it tries to get attention for its cause, rather than its proposed solution to the problem itself.

4.4 National and international actors: the anti-colonial discourse

This discourse maintains that the narrative of *Kony 2012* rests on a foundation of colonial stereotypes and western patriarchy. This discourse assumes that social stereotypes of “bad black men”^{xv} in faraway countries are perpetuated through narratives like *Kony 2012*. In doing so, they present a skewed vision of African barbarism which has its roots in colonialism. The discourse features mainly in the international academic sphere. On the ground in Uganda, journalist Andrew Mwenda, owner of the Independent, is the foremost speaker of this discourse. As one of Uganda’s most critical voices, he often denounces western donor attempts to deliver aid to Africa:

All my life I have seen that the west comes looking for problems. Then, those people from the west appoint themselves the people to solve those problems.^{xvi}

Mwenda does not consider racism or intentionality; he sees narratives like *Kony 2012* as the product of western social conditioning.^{xvii} Rather, the discourse is characterized by notions of western superiority and African passiveness. As such, it is similar to the image of the global borderland as described earlier. The main difference with Duffield is that Mwenda does not see colonial stereotypes as a way to control and monitor Africa; he regards them as a product of a bygone era. People using them, he says, simply cannot help themselves. They repeat what they are taught: “the people who make those narratives are victims of a structure of thought that has been there for centuries”.^{xviii} The discourse enacted by actors like Mwenda attempts to resist racial stereotypes and foreign intervention. It aims to claim agency for domestic solutions to domestic issues in Africa, rather than adopting western solutions.^{xix}

Furthermore, Mwenda considers himself a pioneer of a growing African counter-narrative which will eventually dominate the colonial discourse. As European economies stagnate and African economies grow at exceptional rates, he claims, a new African middle class is emerging which grows increasingly critical of western meddling in African affairs. He argues that inevitably, at some point in the future, colonial discourse as we know it today will cease to exist or function as it does now.^{xx} This counter-narrative is built on notions of economic growth, capital and investment.

4.5 ICC & UPDF: the cosmopolitan discourse

Support for the *Kony 2012* movie and campaign was articulated by several actors. Jimmy Otim (2013), outreach coordinator for the ICC in Uganda, states that both he, the staff of the Kampala regional office and locals in northern Uganda were very pleased with the movie, “because it is urging the international community to act, and act now[...]”.^{xxi} In doing so, Otim’s picture of reality directly contradicts that of Victor Ochen as mentioned before, who elaborated on the local outrage which developed in northern Uganda. Otim, on the other hand, claims that the situation in Lira was mainly media being “hungry” for a good story.^{xxii} Instead, he focuses on the “highly prominent [...] leadership in Gulu” present at the screening in Gulu, who were very positive.^{xxiii} Interestingly, Ochen claimed that these same cultural leaders were paid by IC to present the movie, explaining their enthusiasm.^{xxiv} While this remains to be seen, it stands out that Otim deliberately ignores the fact that the Gulu screening ended in riots. He favours the movie because of it urged international communities to get involved to protect human rights. He consistently defends the movie against criticism because it serves this higher purpose of getting the international community involved.^{xxv}

Ankunda makes a similar claim: “The idea is that there’s more focus on the Lord’s Resistance Army and Joseph Kony by the world. That is very critical, there’s more focus”.^{xxvi} Besides a call to action to the international community, Ankunda also states:

It’s a reminder of the things we haven’t done as the international community, as humanity. See, [...] all those children, all those women who are being raped and children who are being abducted, we owe them an explanation. Why we never did something when that was happening. And it doesn’t matter where you are, it affects all of us equally.^{xxvii}

Ankunda’s analysis of *Kony 2012* seems to have been adopted from Kant (1795) himself, who stated in *Perpetual Peace* that the world is coming to a situation where “a violation of rights in one place is felt throughout the world” (1795: 23). Underlying the discourse used by Otim and Ankunda is a moral cosmopolitan dynamic, which emphasises international responsibility to protect human security on a global scale.

4.6 International NGO’s: efficacy and advocacy

INGOs interviewed in the Netherlands interpreted the *Kony 2012* video in terms of efficacy and advocacy. Being business colleagues, spokespersons for War Child, IKV Pax Christi and Amnesty International expressed being impressed by the rapid spread of *Kony 2012*. The video and campaign served as an example of successful advocacy in their perception. Joost Puijtenbroek, program leader central Africa for IKV Pax Christi framed the video as follows (translation mine):

It was a huge success. I find it amazing that they managed to get so many people interested in the conflict. Of course it [the video] contained all kinds of errors and they framed it as a Ugandan issue while the problem is actually outside of Uganda. They simplified the story to some degree to reach and inform a large audience, but they did just that. Obviously this is what NGOs aspire to and dream of.^{xxviii}

It stands out that these actors are less concerned with the outdated footage than most interviewed subjects. While admitting that the story had been simplified, the discourse prioritizes reaching audiences over factual accuracy. In doing so, the discourse walks a paradoxical tightrope between simplification for publicity on the one hand and the danger of misinforming audiences on the other.

ⁱ Jennifer. Farmer. Awach Sub-county, Gulu District, Uganda. 21 March 2013.

ⁱⁱ Lt. Col. Ankunda, P. Official Spokesperson for the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF). Kampala, Uganda. 1 June 2013.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Bodegraven, R. Head of Advocacy, Campaigning and Communication for War Child. Utrecht, the Netherlands. 10 June 2013.

^v Otim. J. Outreach Coordinator for the International Criminal Court. Kampala, Uganda. 19 April 2013.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Ochen, V. Director of African Youth Initiative Network (AYINET). Kampala, Uganda. 17 May 2013.

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} Ibid.

^x Molly. Taylor. Awach Sub-county, Gulu District, Uganda. 20 March 2013.

^{xi} Ibid.

^{xii} Dennis. Farmer. Awach Sub-county, Gulu District, Uganda. 21 March 2013.

^{xiii} Richard. Farmer. Awach Sub-county, Gulu District, Uganda. 21 March 2013

^{xiv} Ibid.

^{xv} Glazebrook, D. Freelance political writer and journalist. Utrecht, the Netherlands. 14 June 2013.

^{xvi} Mwenda, A. Journalist and owner of The Independent (Uganda). Kampala, Uganda. 2 May 2013.

^{xvii} Ibid.

^{xviii} Ibid.

^{xix} Ibid.

^{xx} Ibid.

xxi Otim. J. 19 April 2013.

xxii Ibid.

xxiii Ibid.

xxiv Ibid.

xxv Ibid.

xxvi Lt. Col. Ankunda, P. 1 June 2013.

xxvii Ibid.

xxviii Puijenbroek, J. Program Leader Central Africa IKV Pax Christi. Utrecht, the Netherlands. 10 June 2013.

5. INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES IN THE WAKE OF *KONY 2012*

During the aftermath of the release of the *Kony 2012* video several military policies were announced. Seen from a discursive perspective, it is interesting to understand how these policies were framed and how the framing used in *Kony 2012* has likely been instrumental in increasing legitimacy for these military efforts in central Africa. Three events will be discussed in this chapter. They will be handled in chronological order. First, the US deployment of 100 Green Beret military advisors aiding in the mission against the LRA and the announcement by US president Barack Obama of their continued presence in Uganda after *Kony 2012*. Second, the takeover of coordination of this mission and the subsequent creation of a Regional Task Force (RTF) comprising of troops from Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), South Sudan and Central African Republic (CAR). Third, a five million dollar bounty put in place by the US State Department for Kony's arrest and transportation to the ICC in The Hague, the Netherlands.

The second section of this chapter will focus on the social and political consequences of these practices and the role of the *Kony 2012* narrative has played since its release. First, it will go into the increased military pressure on Kony and the LRA. Next, the perpetuation of borderland discourse of Sub-Saharan Africa will be dealt with. Finally we will discuss the growing US militarization of the African continent.

5.1 *US assistance in UPDF mission to arrest Kony*

In October 2011 the US sent a team of 100 Army Green Berets to Uganda to support the UPDF troops in their pursuit of Kony and the LRA. The advisers were stationed in Uganda, the DRC, South Sudan and CAR. Because the advisers have an assisting role in the mission, they participate purely through "information, advice and assistance"; they are not to engage enemies unless they are forced to defend themselves (The White House 2011). The objective of the advisers is to train soldiers and assist the mission through intelligence. In other words, they try to locate the whereabouts of Kony and the LRA in the dense jungles of central Africa. According to Titeca, airplanes are used to scan the large areas which may contain the rebels. The step to sending boots on the ground in central Africa was made under the earlier adopted *Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of 2009*, which was signed into

law in 2010 (The White House 2010). The law made the defeat of the LRA part of US foreign policy. The strategic objectives of the act are as follows (Yamamoto 2011):

(1) the increased protection of civilians, (2) the apprehension or removal of Joseph Kony and senior LRA commanders from the battlefield, (3) the promotion of defections from the LRA and support of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of remaining LRA fighters, and (4) the provision of continued humanitarian relief to affected communities.

Large INGOs and influential US NGOs like IC, Enough Project and Human Rights Watch lauded the implementation of the new security policy, framing the deployment as a victory for victims in Uganda and activists in the US who had been demonstrating to get attention for the LRA conflict (Schomerus et al. 2011: 3). Schomerus, Allen and Vlassenroot, experts on the Ugandan conflict, on the other hand, pointed out that the unit was far too small to be of any use to victims or in resolving the true issues underlying the conflict. They ridiculed the uninformed media circus following the announcement. They framed the mission as another military attempt at defeating Kony, similar to the failed AFRICOM-backed Operation Lightning Thunder in 2008 (2011: 3-4). This all happened before the *Kony 2012* video was released, but IC had been lobbying the US government extensively to get more involved.

The presence of the advisers in the *Kony 2012* video has two reasons. First of all, they function as agents of peace in the narrative of IC, representing the moral duty of intervening in humanitarian crises. Unlike the passive local populations, as mentioned earlier, they have the agency to change the situation and initiate progress in the borderlands. They are shown in the movie through two photographs: one of a unit of soldiers next to an American flag, the other featuring one US soldier running next to a unit of UPDF soldiers as a trainer. They are easily recognizable through their uniforms and poses. Second, the mission initially had a strictly short-term status, “with specific goals and objectives”, namely to arrest or otherwise “remove” Kony and the LRA from the battlefield (Yamamoto 2011). In other words, as long as Kony was still at large, the advisers would stay in Uganda. Reframed by IC through the claim that “[...] international support could be removed at any time” (*Kony 2012*), the mission functions as a powerful urgency argument, imploring viewers to support IC’s cause. It is intended to convince

the viewer that the deployed troops can actually be pulled out of Africa, should politicians feel the urge to do so.

The political pressure generated by the *Kony 2012* video appears to have culminated in an announcement made by President Barack Obama on 23 April 2012, when he stated the US will continue its support for the Ugandan plight and its assistance in the mission to arrest Joseph Kony. Obama, speaking at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, told his audience (Condon 2012):

[t]oday I can announce that our advisers will continue their efforts to bring this madman to justice and to save lives. It's part of our regional strategy to end the scourge that is the LRA and help realize a future where no African child is stolen from their family and no girl is raped and no boy is turned into a child soldier.

A simple comparison with previous presidential statements regarding the mission to arrest the LRA shows that Obama's vehement speech was a far cry from the 2010 statement when he signed the Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act into law (The White House 2010). The document, which directly targets the LRA, does not even mention Kony's name. The act targets and frames the LRA as an insurgent group which 'preys on civilians' and makes note of the crimes against humanity carried out by the movement. It states that its leadership is indicted and has no political agenda, but it does not specifically single out Kony (2010). Similarly, during the deployment of the Green Barrette forces to central Africa in October, US Department of State communication was much more neutral: while making mention of Kony, speech acts refrained from inscribing the monstrous upon Kony. Statements regarding Kony were framed in more general terms: "[...] as long as the LRA's leader Joseph Kony and other top commanders remain at large, the LRA will continue to pose a serious regional threat which undermines stability and development" (Yamamoto 2011). The statement focuses on the 'apprehension' or 'removal' of Kony and other leaders from the battlefield as one of the advisers' main tasks (2011). Obama's speech, it can be argued, is far more emotional and laden with monstrous metaphors.

The speech focuses on the juxtaposition of the madman Kony on the one hand and innocent, vulnerable African children who can be "stolen" on the other. It can be pointed out that it seems unusual and awkward to use the word "steal" instead of "kidnap" or "abduct". One might

report a stolen car to the authorities, but not a stolen child. From a moral point of view, it is also much easier to steal a car, a lifeless object. It may result in apprehension by police and, in some cases, some emotional hurt, but otherwise, stealing property is relatively harmless. "Stealing" a child on the other hand, is far more difficult. Not only will children resist being "stolen", they will exhibit a whole range of emotions like panic, hurt, pain etc. which should refrain a rational, empathetic human being from committing such an act. Furthermore, the moral implications of "stealing" a child are incomparable to stealing an object like a car. Not only will a child be deeply traumatised, so will its parents, and in many cases, the entire community, causing years of pain and grief. In other words, Obama seems to objectify African children to resemble emotionless things, property of families. The effect of this is two-fold. First, it complements the monstration of Joseph Kony. Already framed as a morally condemnable being, Kony is framed to lack the empathy to differentiate between abduction and theft, indeed stealing children as if they were things. Second, it adds to the bizarreness of the borderland image, where children can be stolen as if they were nothing, to serve in horrible rebel armies.

It can then be argued that the *Kony 2012* video made possible the public shaming of Kony by the US in very strong language. Obama's naming and shaming clearly feeds from the monstration of Kony. Although IC did not literally frame Kony as a "madman" or to be suffering from any form of mental instability, it opened up the social space for these discourses to emerge and develop. Western media outlets, especially in the wake of *Kony 2012*, also had a new reason to devote their attention to the LRA conflict, which had been left in obscurity. As previously mentioned by Schomerus et al (2011), when concerning the LRA conflict, journalists tend to focus on the Christian mysticism surrounding the LRA and Kony's conviction that he is a spirit medium. Combined with reports of LRA conducts such as maiming and amputation, links to insanity are easily established. Like the monster, the image of the madman also appeals to notions of danger, irrationality and the need for incarceration or destruction. Obama's tirade against Kony forms a powerful message indeed, and it clearly feeds from *Kony 2012's* narrative. Considering the vocabulary Obama uses to target Kony, it is questionable whether Obama had been able to use this particular framing during his speech if *Kony 2012* has never seen the light. Moreover, it is even questionable if he had mentioned the mission at all.

Having determined that the *Kony 2012* narrative has indeed been instrumental in the continuation of US military action in Uganda brings us to the political economy of the narrative

itself. Why did Obama give this emotional speech to legitimate the presence of the US advisers? In the international sphere there are different explanations. Critics often frame *Kony 2012* as a justification for US military involvement in Uganda in an attempt to compete with growing Chinese interests in Africa's untapped resources. Chinese investments in Sub-Saharan Africa have soared since 2007, creating both financial and diplomatic streams to develop between China and numerous countries in Africa (Engdahl 2013). China is especially interested in natural resources and Engdahl (2013) claims that attention spiked when prospective resources were found in a large part of east Africa: "The East African Rift System, as geologists term it, is 'one of the geologic wonders of the world,' and also prospectively, one of the richest treasures of subsurface minerals, including clearly vast untapped reserves of oil and gas" (2013). Glazebrook, a freelance political journalists states:

I suspect it [*Kony 2012*] was more (*sic*) the justification. The US military work in Uganda is all mainly to do with facilitating Ugandan involvement in Somalia. And that began before the Kony thing had got off the ground. [...] Their main motive is sort of terrorizing Chinese capitalism out of the area.^{xxix}

Engdahl (2013) questions the intentions by the US government and IC because *Kony 2012* frames the issue as being Ugandan while the LRA has not been in Uganda for years. This likely serves, he points out, to get boots on the ground in Uganda for reasons other than saving lives (2013): "[t]he issue is whether 'Kony 2012' is being falsely promoted to justify US military intervention where it is unwanted by all parties". As this thesis suggests, however, local communities are not necessarily against meddling by the US.

5.2 AU takeover of coordination of mission to arrest Kony

Another major institutional change in the wake of *Kony 2012* was the African Union's involvement in the UPDF mission to arrest Joseph Kony. In late March the AU announced that it would organize a Regional Task Force (RTF) consisting of troops from Uganda, DRC, South Sudan and CAR to continue the search for Joseph Kony and the LRA (UN News Centre 2013). The mission, initially headed and carried out by the UPDF, is now mandated and coordinated by the AU. The mission is backed by the UN and still supported by the US military advisers. The Task Force was to grow from the original 2,000 UPDF troops to approximately 5,000^{xxx} in total. During the press conference announcing the AU's plans, Secretary-General's Special

Representative and head of the UN Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) Abou Moussa mentions *Kony 2012* in response to a question. Moussa states that although the videos was controversial, it has created a lot of awareness and attention for the LRA conflict. He continues to say that “[t]he central theme of this video remains valid – first, Kony continues to kill and maim innocent civilians; second, Kony and his people should be put under arrest” (UN News Centre 2013). Again, initial focus is placed with Kony as an individual and the crimes he has committed. Kony’s status as a symbol, as a collective enemy, allows for the crimes committed by the LRA as a whole to be inscribed upon Kony’s existence. The AU, in other words, seemed to have a sudden interest in the LRA case. Ochen stated that the plans had been there for years, but that the slow decision making processes delayed the final takeover of coordination. The fact that it happened so soon after the *Kony 2012* video went viral, he maintains, was smartly planned out by IC, who have their own people lobbying the AU.^{xxxi} It can be argued, however, that the release of the video brought the announcement of the AU to be far more public than it could have been otherwise.

The interests of the AU for intervening in the LRA mission can be argued to be based on international legitimacy for the institution itself. The AU is still a largely ineffective institution in Africa. Established in 2002, the AU’s ambition was a more integrated and unified continent. Revolutionary plans for a single gold-based currency and a single army made the AU a potential important player in international politics (Glazebrook 2013). These developments were also a threat to western influence in the continent, however. Africa was becoming more independent and less reliable on western aid. To make sure that they wouldn’t lose their grip on Africa, Glazebrook argues, western powers have intentionally sabotaged the structures of the AU to keep it militarily and politically impotent (2013). The foremost examples are the NATO bombing and subsequent destabilization of Libya and the creation and role of US Africa Command (AFRICOM), the American military branch which is looking to base itself in Africa. Glazebrook claims that Libya was invaded by NATO forces because its leader Muammar Gaddafi was elected Chairman of the AU. Gaddafi proposed fast-paced structural changes for the African continent which potentially threatened western interests. The implementation of a single currency, the gold-backed Dinar, was a major concern. Glazebrook: “[h]is [Gaddafi’s] fate is clearly now a matter of public record” (2013). Although the fate of Col. Gaddafi is subject of ongoing debate and this thesis is not meant to tackle this debate, what Glazebrook succinctly

points out is that the AU has been severely weakened since Gaddafi's death, especially during a period in which it potentially could have gained more ground in Africa.

The creation of AFRICOM is another highly contested issue in the context of the AU.

Established in 2008, it represents the US Pentagon in Africa. Its mission is "[...] to promote U.S. strategic objectives by working with African partners to help strengthen stability and security in the region through improved security capability and military professionalization" (CRS 2009: 1). AFRICOM, set up under the Bush administration, regards the stabilization of failed states to be of utmost importance as "they may become safe havens for terrorists" (2009: 15). Other US interests in Africa are "[...] oil, global trade, armed conflicts, terror, and HIV/AIDS" (2009: 12), which is a large list of responsibilities for AFRICOM, especially considering its relatively small troop force of 2,000. The command therefore usually carries out assisting and training missions in Africa, for example to train UPDF forces in Uganda for the AMISOM mission in Somalia. With the creation of AFRICOM came the inevitable question of its location on the African continent. The US Congressional Research Service claims that attempts were made to find a suitable location for a base and that there was "no resistance to the idea" (2009: 21). However, the largest donor states in the AU collectively rejected the presence of an AFRICOM base in their countries (Glazebrook 2013). US militarization of the continent was not welcome and the Pentagon had to find another base of operations. In the end, AFRICOM was located in Stuttgart, Germany where it is still based today. The AU's weak status and its tense relations with AFRICOM, then, forms the context in which the AU took over control of the mission to arrest Kony.

International interview subjects generally framed the involvement of the AU as directly related to the popularity of the *Kony 2012* campaign. They also it as a political tool for the AU to gain legitimacy in Africa. All NGO staff members interviewed in the Netherlands stated that they were convinced that both the AU and the US made their announcements because of the political pressure resulting from the movie's popularity.^{.xxxii xxxiii xxxiv} Others also mentioned that the announcement and takeover was a way for the AU to position itself as a regional peacekeeping force. Kristof Titeca argues that "the AU wants to position itself as a conflict resolving mechanism and the LRA issue, receiving wide publicity, was a major opportunity for them to position themselves as such".^{.xxxv} The *Kony 2012* video, in other words, was instrumental in opening the social space for the AU to take over the mission in the international sphere. After

all, the publicity gained by *Kony 2012* meant that the takeover was noticed widely, leading to an increase of legitimacy for the institution.

It can be argued, then, that the decision of the African Union to takeover coordination of the mission to arrest Joseph Kony was an attempt to create more regional cohesion within Africa and a way to position itself as an umbrella organisation overseeing this cohesion. The AU, as weak as it is currently, had a formidable potential to solve regional and international problems on the African continent. The *Kony 2012* video, indeed in its wake bringing unprecedented attention for the LRA conflict, formed an opportunity for the AU to very publicly attempt to establish some form of agency over the independent forces of Africa. The AU, in other words, had a chance to become more of an independent international institution of conflict management on the African continent. In this reading, the AU mirrors the aforementioned discourse used by Andrew Mwenda. The move by the AU to take over coordination of the mission to arrest Kony represents a growing African independence. It is a message to other states and institutions that the AU can take care of its continent, thereby portraying a preference for domestic solutions to domestic problems.

The current situation, however, has shown little progress towards the capture of Kony. From the moment the RTF was put into place, issues started revealing themselves. Of the planned 5,000 troops, as mentioned earlier, only 2,500 are actually stationed, the large majority of them being UPDF troops. Lt. Col. Ankunda mirrored this issue. He acknowledged that *Kony 2012* helped to get the AU involved, but complained about the lack of help from the other countries:

Congo? Pff! They are not contributing seriously because [...] they are saying “we are not going beyond our borders” so that does not help to fight the rebels who are fighting in another country. Central Africa. South Sudan, OK, they are there. One leg here, another leg here. So it’s really UPDF [*sic*] because we have over 2,500 soldiers there [...] that needs to change.^{xxxvi}

In other words, the mission is still by and large dominated by UPDF troops. The reason other countries are not committed, Kristof Titeca argues, is because “it is an initiative on paper. [...] they [the AU] are supposed to coordinate, but it does not mean anything”.^{xxxvii} He goes on to point out that the mission as a whole is ineffective because none of the involved governments have any interest in the area.^{xxxviii} Instead, regional governments are more concerned about their

territorial integrity to effectively cooperate. After the massive failure of Operation Lightning Thunder in 2008 the DRC banned UPDF forces from entering the country. With the AU move to combine forces, the DRC feared that the UPDF would use it as an excuse to once again cross the border.^{xxxix} To make matters worse, the mission is currently suspended in Central African Republic (CAR).

The Regional Task Force was suspended when Séléka rebels ousted president Bozizé from CAR on 24 March 2013. In a violent coup d'état leaving 13 South African soldiers dead the rebels seized power in the capital Bangui. The Séléka rebels leader Michel Djotodia elected himself president and installed a cabinet of his own movement and local political parties (Kasasira 2013). Immediately following the coup a period of chaos and looting ensued in the capital. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay described the situation as "extremely worrying", as shortages of food and drinking water, violent clashes between Séléka rebels and Bozizé supporters and reports of children being conscripted started leaking out of Bangui (Dembassa-Kette 2013). In response of the overthrow, the AU suspended CAR and the US and UN openly condemned the illegal coup (Dixon 2013). One week later the Séléka rebels issued forth a statement, demanding that all foreign troops leave CAR territory (Kasasira 2013).

The worsening situation led to a temporary halt in activities by the AU forces which were stationed in CAR at the time. Troops were ordered by the AU to retreat to a main base on the eastern border of CAR, near South Sudan.^{xi} They were told to remain in their base and fight if needed by president Museveni of Uganda.^{xii} No hostilities between Séléka rebels and AU forces have taken place. Ankunda mentioned that the rebels were wise to do so, because they would have been destroyed.^{xiii} The mission to capture Kony remains suspended up to this day, however, leaving the LRA free to do as they please. In an interesting turn of events, during the hostile takeover of CAR, Kony was mentioned in news headlines saying that he was at peace in CAR. Kony had supposedly called his family in northern Uganda and told them that he was not planning on returning to Uganda.^{xiiii} Felix Kulayigye, who was still spokesperson for the UPDF at the time, responded quickly to the hostile takeover in March and stated that the troops in CAR were awaiting orders to continue, as the US embassy, government of Uganda and the AU started looking for a solution (Kasasira 2013). None seems to have been found so far. The troops are still stationed in their base and news a solution has not yet been presented. The lack of progress can arguably be ascribed to the lack of interest among the involved parties to

continue. Moreover, to many actors, the status quo is preferable to actually finding and arresting Kony. This brings us to the final section of this thesis, namely the social and political consequences of the *Kony 2012* campaign.

5.3 Consequences

The *Kony 2012* video has had important social and political consequences which need to be considered. First of all, the video set out to make the military defeat of Joseph Kony a priority in the international sphere and it seems to have achieved that to a degree. The massive attention the video generated for the LRA conflict has proven instrumental in moving political decision making towards an increase in military assets in the pursuit of Kony and the LRA. The US military advisers on the ground in Uganda are assisting the now joint AU mission and they seem to be closing in on the LRA. Furthermore, Kony's rebel army consists of a minimum amount of fighters and US-based NGO The Resolve, a close partner of IC, claim that Kony has been losing his grip on the LRA since early 2012 (Muhumuza 2013). The goal of actually capturing Kony, then, seems to draw ever closer.

However, the low degree of commitment to the mission by most member states involved leads to the belief that Kony is still a convenient political excuse for increased militarization of this region in central Africa. It is generally believed that the reason the LRA was never defeated was not because of its military supremacy or guerrilla warfare tactics, but because it gave Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni effective tools for his reign. First of all, the constant threat of the LRA allowed Museveni to increase spending on defence, thereby creating the strongest army in the region. This in turn made Museveni an important partner to western powers on the frontline against Islamic extremism in the early nineties and later the global War against Terror, leading to increased foreign donor streams (Mwenda in Allen & Vlassenroot 2010: 51) Second of all, Kony is an Acholi from the northern part of Uganda. A history of ethnic strife between north and south Uganda, initiated by colonial powers, has been the foundation of many violent clashes since independence. Museveni could use the boogeyman image of Kony as a wedge between the various tribes of Uganda, using a divide and conquer technique based on mutual fear to systematically marginalize the northern population while keeping himself in power (2010: 54). The current situation is showing signs of the same dynamics: there seems to be no real reason for many involved to capture Kony, other than increased western pressure catalysed by the *Kony 2012* video. The Séléka rebel takeover of CAR, from this perspective, is merely

convenient for all parties involved. The Ugandan government and its allies can keep spending on defence and expand their armies while external situations “force” them to suspend the mission itself. Furthermore, even if the mission were to continue, the “invisible” Kony, partly built up in the west through the very narrative *Kony 2012*, is somewhere ‘out there’ in the deep jungles of CAR, DRC and Sudan. The high impossibility of locating him has already been established by the fact that the American advisors’ intelligence still seems to have no idea where he is. As such, Kony has been called “Africa’s Osama bin Laden”, the illusive national enemy of the US, who was also impossible to locate and finally killed under mysterious circumstances (Engdahl 2012). In the end, national interests like the protection of natural resources and regional military dominance may indeed be at play over a cosmopolitan responsibility to help those in need.

Another effect of the *Kony 2012* campaign is the increasing legitimacy of US military presence on the African continent. The increasing militarization of Africa by the US faced a setback when the newly created AFRICOM was met with resistance from prominent AU member states and was forced to locate itself in Stuttgart. The AU, with Muammar Gaddafi as chair, seemed at a point in time when it had the opportunity to initiate important changes. When Gaddafi was defeated and killed by NATO bombings, the severely weakened structure of the AU became weak again (Glazebrook 2013). Its attempt to gain more agency for an independent Africa had failed, opening up the opportunity for external actors to increasingly meddle in African affairs. The *Kony 2012* movie promotes such meddling. It clearly conveys the message that unless American forces assist in the mission to capture Kony, there will be no end to civilian suffering in the region. It promotes military intervention by US forces and asks its audience to demand the same thing. Not long after the movie went viral, US president Obama presented his determination to stay in Uganda. In doing so, he mirrors the drive of the US to keep boots on the ground in Africa. Also, the lack of opposing force signifies the international legitimacy the US has to do so. The lack of tangible results from the military advisers seems to be taken for granted and obscured through the confusing borderland image portrayed by *Kony 2012*.

On a more theoretical level, the *Kony 2012* narrative upholds, perpetuates and complements borderland imaginaries of Sub-Saharan Africa. The narrative feeds form and into popular imaginings which are informed by the spectacular, the nocturnal and the horrible. It portrays a battle to be fought for humanity and rationality, on the foundations of a moral

cosmopolitanism, armed with the knowledge that what *we* do is right. Manifested in the image of Uganda as a borderland, *Kony 2012* created social space for the naming and shaming of Joseph Kony and generated legitimacy for increased military practices against the LRA. What this shows us is that borderland imaginaries of faraway places are still very much part and parcel of dominant western discourse. What was emphasised, however, is that these narratives have a very distinct goal of portraying the inhabitants of borderlands either as victims or perpetrators. They have no agency, political standing or self-determination, only to be subjected to misery and awaiting salvation by western powers. The *Kony 2012* narrative perpetuates this image and complements it by adding the monstrous, nocturnal image of Joseph Kony as a “bad guy” stealing children. It thereby not only simplifies the conflict, it simplifies victims’ suffering. The massive awareness generated by the video also promotes this way of presenting a conflict for future campaigns. NGO staff told how impressed they were by the video’s success and that they would certainly use it as example material for their own campaigns. This is not to say that the world will be flooded with Konys anytime soon, but the mechanisms and metaphors used in the video may affect future aid campaigns and legitimations for military intervention in general.

When we return to the initial theoretical debate, it becomes clear that mutually excluding explanations of humanitarian war are difficult to uphold. It is more important to understand the workings of discourse and how it feeds from and into existing regimes of truth to eventually be institutionalized in tangible behaviour and power relations. The *Kony 2012* campaign shows that a transnational, modern and distinctly cosmopolitan narrative can have very real consequences in the world and that these consequences are often challenged by other actors. It set in motion discourse, action and laid bare power dynamics underlying international relations. On a discursive level, a battle between supporters and those who oppose it shows that theory is often put into practice, as some support the cosmopolitan core of the narrative and many oppose it, seeing it as a way to instrumentalize power.

^{xxix} Glazebrook, D. Freelance journalist. Utrecht, the Netherlands. 14 June 2013.

^{xxx} Lt. Col. Ankunda, P. Official Spokesperson for Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF). Kampala, Uganda. 1 June 2013.

^{xxxi} Ochen, Victor. Director of African Youth Initiative Network (AYINET). Kampala, Uganda. 17 May 2013.

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- xxxii Bodegraven, Robert. Head of Advocacy, Campaigning and Communication for War Child. Utrecht, the Netherlands. 10 June 2013.
- xxxiii Puijenbroek, Joost. Program Leader Central Africa IKV Pax Christi. Utrecht, the Netherlands. 10 June 2013.
- xxxiv Vlaming, Frederik de. Blogger/activist for Amnesty International. Utrecht, the Netherlands. 24 June 2013.
- xxxv Titeca, K. Researcher Antwerp University. Utrecht, the Netherlands. 5 June 2013.
- xxxvi Lt. Col. Ankunda, P. 1 June 2013.
- xxxvii Ibid.
- xxxviii Titeca, K. 5 June 2013.
- xxxix Ibid.
- xl Lt. Col. Ankunda, P. 1 June 2013.
- xli Ibid.
- xlii Lt. Col. Ankunda, P. 14 June 2013.
- xliii Ibid.

Conclusion

This thesis has given an account of the use of borderland discourse and monster metaphor in the *Kony 2012* campaign by Invisible Children. In this investigation, the aim was to assess how the narrative of this video has been interpreted by relevant actors and how it has been instrumental in legitimating the security policy measures which had been taken in its wake.

It has been argued that *Kony 2012* has a very powerful narrative, laden with nocturnal imaginings of borderlands and the monstrous. The narrative as a whole has been shown to simplify and depoliticize the LRA conflict in Uganda while at the same time legitimating violent conflict as a just response to human suffering. It does so by robbing victims of agency and placing it firmly with external actors, imprinting on them a responsibility to protect. Furthermore, these narratives have been shown to have their foundations in Kantian and Habermasian cosmopolitanism. However, in placing the human at the centre they strive for a moral form of cosmopolitanism, grounded a distinctly modern need to save others and help them progress from barbarity to more acceptable means of survival.

In the end, the *Kony 2012* video generated unprecedented attention for the LRA conflict, creating political opportunities for both the US government and the African Union. For the US, it meant it was in a position to publicly name and shame Joseph Kony by making use of the borderland discourse and monster metaphor so carefully constructed by Invisible Children. Moreover, it could make use of the justification and legitimation produced by the video to reassert its determination to keep its troops in Uganda. The AU on the other hand gained an unexpected chance to improve its regional image by very publicly taking over command of the UPDF-led mission to arrest the monster created by IC. It chose not to take this opportunity to challenge the borderland image presented in the video. The mission itself, however, is fraught with uncooperative states, territorial claims and a regional conflict. The mission is currently stagnated and it seems that most states involved are fine with this status quo.

The lessons learned from *Kony 2012* are that the consistent perpetuation of borderland discourse and use of monstration metaphors are still extremely capable in opening up social space for political change. Also, the legitimacy for powerful western states to militarize the African continent can continue unabated by making use of these discourses. This leads to much

criticism from local NGOs and academics, but local civilians seem to generally support external help.

Finally, a number of important limitations need to be considered. First, this research mainly focused on the *Kony 2012* campaign video. The subsequent videos released by Invisible Children were not included as research material. Next, due to time and access constraints, the role of the government of Uganda has received less attention than in an ideal situation. Also, more local NGOs should have been included in the sample.

Further research might explore discursive practices in the case of Central African Republic and the stagnated mission. It would also be interesting to assess how counter-narratives from middleclass Africans challenge western borderland discourse and how these counter-narratives are received in western states, if at all. Finally, the US State Department set out a bounty for the tip leading to Kony's arrest and transfer to The Hague. First of all, the timing of the announcement of the bounty was very interesting as it happened days after the Séléka takeover in CAR. It would be interesting to examine the political aims of this bounty at that point in time. Furthermore, a representative of the State Dept. highly contested the use of the term 'bounty'. An in-depth research into the framings of this event would also be an interesting research topic.

This research may also suggest some courses of action to be taken. First of all, the AU mission to arrest Kony is in dire need of improvement. Until now, the AU seems to have had little impact on the success of the mission. Internal issues notwithstanding, the involvement of the African Union as an umbrella organization seems more likely to serve the mission in the long run than to work against it. If the AU's political legitimacy were greater, it could find some way of creating greater cohesion between the states involved in the mission and pressure them to actually deliver the support that was agreed upon.

Another issue to be tackled is the perpetuation of borderland images in popular discourse. As explained, the narratives presented focus solely on the misery of victimized others. In doing so, it effectively robs them of any self-determination and agency. Attempts at raising awareness of progress made by communities themselves in the wake of misery would be laudable.

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