The Creation of Identity Boundaries in Northern Uganda: A Religious Dimension to an Ethnic Conflict.
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Introduction

Since 1986 northern Uganda has been plagued by a vicious civil war that has brutally disrupted the lives of civilian population. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has waged a war against the Uganda People Defense Forces (UDPF) representing the government of Yoweri Museveni. In reality, however, the war has mainly been fought against the civilian population. In the name of the Lord an estimated 25,000 children have been abducted, tens of thousands civilians have been killed and between 1.6 to 2 million people have been driven in Internally Displaced Person (IDPs) camps (Ssenyonjo 2007, 52). The reality of the conflict that civilians have to face on a daily basis, seems therefore very far away from Bible's dictates of faith, hope and love. The conflict in northern Uganda has mainly effected the Acholi sub-region of northern Uganda, but also Lango and Teso subregions. However, due to its involvement in regional tensions, the LRA has also moved into neighboring countries as South Sudan, the Democratic Replubic of Congo (DRC) and the Central African Republic (CAR).

As the name already suggests, the LRA cannot be seen separated from its relation to religion. The LRA leader, Joseph Kony, claims to be a prophet who receives communication from God through spirit mediums, resulting in an Africanized mixed version of Christianity and Islam. Although, as Franck van Acker shows in his study of the LRA, the 'Africanization' of Christianity in the LRA often leads to quite creative visions in relation to the orthodox Christian faith (2004, 349). Kony acts as a medium for many different spirits who provide the orders to achieve a better world for the people of Uganda via him.

The LRA did not emerge from thin air, but is in fact based on a number of former rebel groups active in northern Uganda. It is based predominantly on the remnants of the Uganda's People Democratic Army (UPDA) - which had split up after a disputed peace treaty with Museveni's National Resistance Army (NRA) - and the Holy Spirit Movement (Van Acker 2004, 346-8). The Holy Spirit Movement was particularly important since it largely formed the religious discourse on which the LRA bases itself today. To understand the role of religion in the LRA it is therefore of vital importance to understand the Holy Spirit Movement.

On January 2nd, 1985, the Christian spirit Lakwena took possession of an Acholi women named Alice Auma. At this time Uganda had just experienced a brutal civil war causing much suffering under the population. This suffering was often explained in an idiom of witchcraft which illustrated a vicious cycle of suffering and revenge resulting in great amounts of evil energy and evil spirits amongst the Acholi people (Behrend, 27).The spirit Lakwena had ordered Alice to heal the Acholi people from evil by purifying them from witchcraft. However, since gross human right violations were still committed by government as well as rebel movements, the spirit ordered Alice to wage a military war against the internal as well as external evil that had plagued the region for many years (Behrend, 6). Therefore in 1986 Alice raised a military faction in the HSM, the Holy Spirit Mobile Forces.

It is my thesis that the conflict boundary in northern Uganda between the government and rebels is based on religious as well as ethnic identities. In my view the rebels base their collective identity on shared ethnic grievances and shared religious beliefs. The way people identify themselves with a certain group is of crucial importance to the mobilization of an insurgency movement. A confrontation with the other can create the formation of an in-group and an out-

group with their boundaries based on the sharing of, or resentment towards a common identity. In a confrontation the in- and out- group will be opposing each other based on a shared collective identity. The formation of a collective identity forms an ideal basis for collective action. Although I do not underestimate the importance of individual perceptions towards identity, I will primarily focus on identity boundaries on a collective level.

Identity boundaries determine who is a member of the group and who is not and can be based on a wide spectrum of human identities. As opposed to what might appear from a conflict situation – where contrasting identities are so strongly stigmatized - people have multiple identities. A person can be a French citizen, a citizen of the European Union, a factory worker, masculine, a Christian, a Roman Catholic, a miniature train collector and a devoted fan of The Beatles all at the same time. Each of these different identities combined, in all their various shapes and sizes, is what creates the 'self' of a human being. These identities separately can make a person member of a certain group, for example Beatle fans or French citizens. On top of that certain identities can be of higher or lower value to a person; someone can feel very strongly about his Christian or masculine identity and can care less about being French. How people value a certain identity is often depending on the context. The importance of a certain identity – for example being Christian – often increases emphasis in contrast with the 'other'. When a moderate Christian is confronted with a Muslim society, he can start to rate his Christian values much higher.

A collective identity can thus be based on several forms of identity. However, does it matter on the basis of which of these identities an identity boundary is created? My thesis is that the rebels define themselves by ethnic as well as by a religious collective identity, which I will illustrate in the following chapters. In theory, ethnic identity appears to be more 'sticky' than religious identity, since religion is based upon faith and ethnicity is often perceived to be more static. However, in practice, ethnicity is much less static than it appears to be and religious conversion is not that common (Kaufman 2011, 92). Which leads me to the question if there is a difference between the influence of religion and ethnicity in the creation of identity boundaries in the conflict in northern Uganda.

Although identity boundaries are reinforced by the confrontation with the other, I will mainly focus on the side of the rebels, since this party provides a better illustration of the influence of both religion and ethnicity on the group identity. To answer my question I will therefore not focus on what confronts the rebels with the government, but what sets the rebels apart as a group.

To answer my question I will first look at the creation of ethnic identity boundaries. Through this theoretical framework I will look at how ethnic identity boundaries lead to ethnic violence in northern Uganda by means of marginalization, militarization and mobilization. Next, I will look at how religion and ethnicity are different in their influence on the creation of identity boundaries and show how these theoretical differences are reflected in northern Uganda.

1 Ethnicity

It is difficult to precisely define ethnicity. When can a conflict be labeled 'ethnic' and when can it not? Is ethnicity connected to the concept of race and can it be seen by physical appearances such as the color of the skin, the texture of the hair or the size of the nose? Or is ethnicity whatever a person wants it to be? Can ethnicity also be a person's status as a Beatle fan? When we should define ethnicity in coordination with the concept of race, we would not be able to count the Rwandan conflict between Hutus and Tutsis as ethnic since they would be considered as belonging to the same race, but Hutus and Tutsis would clearly define themselves as different groups. However, we would not consider Beatle fans as an ethnic group either. Ethnicity therefore goes deeper than a categorization of race, but does require a certain indivisible character.

The division between different ethnic groups calls for a common narrative which frames the boundaries of the in-group and the out-group. Antony Smith (1986 in: Kaufman 2011, 93), considered one of the founders of the field of the interdisciplinary study of nationalism, defines ethnicity as the sharing of a name, a believed descent, elements of a culture (most often language or religion), historical memory and attachment to a particular territory.

Ethnic differences are never the sole core of violent conflict. What then defines ethnic conflict? Wollf and Cordell state that ethnic conflict is a conflict in which the distinct ethnic identity is the reason why this particular group feels marginalized (2011, 4). A conflict party should frame it's claims and goals on a perceived or existing distinct ethnicity. The Peace Research Institute in Oslo states that at least one party of the conflict should define its goals in ethnic terms and that the conflict's boundaries are of ethnic distinction.

When we relate identity boundaries to violent conflict, a question of causality immediately rises to the surface. Are clashing identities the root cause of violent conflict, or does violent conflict fueled by underlying causes lie at the basis of the formation of the us versus them discourse? An important intellectual debate in the relation between ethnicity and identity boundaries is the primordialist-instrumentalist debate. The question in this debate is whether ethnicity is a static fact or that it can be manipulated. The 'instrumentalist' school of thought suggests that ethnicity is merely an instrument to frame disputes over territory, power or economic gain. Ethnicity would be a tool for elites to create previously non-existent boundaries in order to mobilize the people for personal gain (Hardin 1995). The instrumentalist view states that ethnicity is created through a top-down process of elites driven by power, money or other personal gains. Roughly stated it finds that any of the many identities an individual person has can be manipulated to create group boundaries. This view oversees, however, the influence of each individual agent to the structure that he finds himself in. People are not mere puppets that can be set at hand by elites.

On the other side of the debate we find the 'primordialist' school of thought, which suggests that ethnicity is a static and unchangeable concept (Kaufman 2011, 92). This school of thought assumes that ethnicity is connected to a person by birth. Ethnicity would therefore not be subject to influence at all, but in fact be a static set of historical and cultural facts passed on from generation to generation. According to this school of thought, ethnicity goes back hundreds of years and ethnic conflict would therefore be a cause of 'ancient hatreds' between different ethnic groups.

Although these views create a particularly interesting frame of reference for the thought on ethnic conflict, they are rather black and white. As Stathis N. Kalyvas beautifully states:

> "Civil wars are not binary conflicts, but complex and ambiguous processes that foster the 'joint' action of local and supralocal actors, civilians, and armies, whose alliance results in violence that aggreagates yet still reflects their diverse goals. It is the convergence of local motives and supralocal imperatives that endows civil wars with their particular and often puzzling character, straddling the divide between the political and the private, the collective and the individual." (2003, 475)

Violent conflicts are never black and white but complex and dynamic processes of human interaction. Ethnic conflicts are therefore neither purely based on demagogic elites, nor are they solely a result of historic feuds.

Between the primordialist and intstrumentalist view lies the 'constructivist' school of thought. This school of thought states that ethnicity is not an unchangeable concept, but more a socially constructed group identity (Ranger, 1992). Since identity boundaries are subject to group perception and to individual perception, they are not static. Although identity boundaries - as the decisive factor for inclusion or exclusion to a certain group - are sometimes framed as

constant factors, they are in fact very dynamic. They are constantly moved by structure as well as by agency. The inputs of each individual agent combined are the creators of the structure, but each individual agent by itself is simultaneously influenced by the structure. On one hand, identity boundaries are influenced on the individual level by personal perception towards a certain identity as well as by personal interests. On the other hand, the perception of the individual can be manipulated by the creation of identity boundaries through social structures. Especially in a situation of violent conflict, the framing of identity through propaganda can be highly influential to the personal perception, but at the same time each individual is in their own way responsible for the creation of identity boundaries by valuing their belonging to a certain group.

The creation of ethnic identity boundaries is not sufficient to result in ethnic conflict. The fact that certain groups have a different ethnic identity does not explain why these groups should engage in violence. Belgium has for years known an ethnic division of Flemish and Walloon people mainly based on a language barrier, but neither of these groups have taken up arms against the other.

For ethnic differences to result in ethnic conflict other factors are essential. In the conflict of northern Uganda, three factors emerge throughout the history of the conflict that can be seen as essential for the ethnic identity boundaries to result in violent conflict. The Acholi (and other ethnic groups in northern Uganda as Langi and Teso) experienced a feeling of ethnic marginalization, illustrated by different episodes in the collective history, on which I will elaborate in the next paragraph. The history of violence in Ugandan politics creates a highly militarized society. The militarization of society and the grievances created by this collective history of marginalization and violence are used by demagogic leaders to mobilize the ethnic groups for collective violent action. In the next paragraphs I will elaborate on these factors and show how they contribute to the creation of ethnic boundaries resulting in ethnic violence.

1.1 Ethnic Marginalization

When an ethnic group feels marginalized in an economic or institutional way ethnicity can come to define peoples identity. Nagel underlines the importance of the politicalization of ethnicity in the creation of ethnic groups (1994, 156-160). Formal ethnic labeling gives the feeling of ethnicity a more static and official character. Especially when politically controlled resources are distributed along ethnic lines, policies can have an enormous effect on the shaping of ethnic identification. Politically executed ethnic marginalization forms a clear incentive for mobilization. In order to get a clear view of ethnic marganilization and mobilization in northern Uganda, we first have to understand the history of the conflict.

The claims of the Acholi in the conflict today are framed in relation to the grievances that were caused by the constant warfare. The ethnic grievances of the Acholi mainly relate to four periods in history. The marginalization of the Acholi is perceived to have started during the colonial times. Because of the more politically developed Southern kingdoms, the British favored the South of Uganda over the less politically developed northern people (Broere 2005, 13). After the independence, state-building happened by using the army as an instrument of domestic politics in which claims of power were based on ethnic retaliation. Under most of the subsequent governments, the Acholi were strongly marginalized. The political marginalization under these governments is seen as a second historical grievance for the Acholi people. The third ethnic grievance is derived from the Idi Amin period, when Amin ordered the ethnic cleansing of the army from mainly Langi and Acholi in fear of their support for Obote (Van Acker 2004, 340). The fourth ethnic grievance is based on the flouting of the Nairobi peace accords by the NRA. In January 1986 the National Resistance Army of Museveni ousted the

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first Acholi president Tito Okello just two months after signing a peace accord in Nairobi. To this day the Acholi still feel betrayed by these so called 'peace jokes' since they feel that they had paved the way for Museveni to overthrow Obote and that Museveni had paid them back by ignoring the Nairobi peace accords (Van Acker 2004, 340 and Behrend 1999, 24). After Museveni rose to power, the political marginalization of the Acholi and other north-eastern people continued, contributing to the feeling of ethnic discrimination by the government.

These grievances together harden ethnic boundaries in a self-reinforcing process of increasing mutual distrust. "Each group is led to formulate a worst case analysis of the others intentions, while demagogic leaders dominate the political space by selectively using the historical record to validate the analysis." (Van Acker, 340). The conflict in northern Uganda is therefore a clear example of Nagel's theory that politicalization of ethnicity creates very strong identity boundaries.

1.2 Militarization

Ethnic violence has always played a large role in the political history of Uganda. Statebuilding in Uganda took place in a constant recurring violence and counter violence dynamic. Van Acker states that "[i]t has been the tragedy of Ugandan politics that violence became a first rather than last resort, in which every war can be justified since it is always embedded in a history of attack and counter attack, of suffering and revenge" (2004, 336). In her research of the HSM, Heike Behrend shows that in Acholi there is a difference in war in attack (*lweny lapir)* and war in retaliation (*lweny kulo kwar)* (1999, 39). This idiom is used to justify war and was also used by the Holy Spirit Mobile Forces. However, in a system of constant violence and counter violence, war can always be seen as *lweny kulo kwar* and therefore just.

Before the existence of the state, tribal violence in the form of cattle raiding was a very common way of establishing power between different tribes. Attacks on an opposing tribe served as a tool to establish the power of the tribe and to demonstrate the masculinity of the warriors (Behrend, 39). The challenging of government power and coups need to be seen in this light. To take over state power does not only mean that the usurper would gain wealth and power, but also gave him the chance to take revenge against members of the ethnic group the former leader belonged to. The capitalization of ethnic and regional tensions gave rebels as well as changing governments a frame for the legitimization of their power.

The violent political history of Uganda does not only create politicalized identity boundaries, but is also responsible for the creation of a 'lumpen-militariat' class (Van Acker, 338). After a political conflict has been settled, former combatants often find themselves unable to adjust to peasant life. Behrend shows that the failure of former combatants to reintegrate in society is a recurring problem in northern Uganda. She shows that the problem of former soldiers to integrate in society helps to create a militairat class. "I assumed that the HSM (…) was a peasant revolt against the state and I planned to take their side more or less clearly. But I was soon forced to realize that most of the original members of the HSM were not peasants but soldiers who had fought in the '81-'85 civil war and who could not or would not pursue any other occupation than waging war and killing. Their goal was to get rich, take their revenge and regain the share in the state power they had lost (Behrend, 8)".

By creating the HSMF, Alice Lakwena attempted to break this vicious cycle by disciplining the soldiers in her own movement with the Holy Spirit Safety Precautions and purifying the former combatants by means of religious rituals. In line with Behrend, Van Acker also states that a recurring problem in northern Uganda are the ill-skilled untrained soldiers of government as well as rebel armies

who are unable to return to society and are therefore left with no other choice than to resume fighting in the same or in other armies. The ethnic grievances together with the lumpen-militairat class formed by the violent political history of Uganda created a fertile recruitment ground for resistance movements such as UDPA, HSM/F and later the LRA.

1.3 Mobilization

As I stated earlier ethnic conflict is not only based on a feeling marginalization, but an insurgency movement also needs to be mobilized. Although the HSMF did not wage a classical guerilla war, they were very dependent on popular support (Behrend 1999, 68). It is therefore essential for the well-being of the movement to win the hearts and minds of the civilian population. The HSMF had two organizations responsible for this task. The Frontline Coordination Team and the War Mobilization Committee were primarily concerned with the relations between the HSMF and the population. When the forces marched to Kampala, the FCT was sent forward to ascertain popular support and the WMC was particularly concerned with the mobilization of the people for the HSM. Their main task was to inform people about the existence of the movement, its need for popular support, moral education and education in the rules and regulations of the spirit Lakwena.

By use of the WMC the HSM did not gain popular support through coercion, but through winning hearts and minds. The image civilians had of Alice and the movement was therefore very important. The faith in Alice's status of prophet was not undisputed and was highly related to military success or failure. When military successes stayed out, doubts about Alices ability as a spirit medium were openly expressed (Behrend, 82). Alice Lakwena was by sympathizers depicted as prophet and by enemies as witch. These images formed for both parties an effective propagandistic view. According to Behrend it is characteristic for a prophet to be viewed as witch. The same was the case for for example Jeanne d'Arc. The task of the WMC was to establish the image of prophet with the civilians.

The LRA is less dependent on popular support since the resource needs of the LRA are since the involvement of Sudan in the conflict mostly depending on support from the Sudanese government. The concerns of the LRA about their image towards the population are therefore quite low. Next to that, Behrend states that "[t]he decision for or against a movement was rarely a political one, more often it was a decision based on security, solidarity with the clan etc." (Behrend, 71). Therefore the LRA is more often getting its popular support through coercion instead of winning hearts and minds. To the change of the character of the conflict with the LRA I will come back later, since it is important first to establish the religious character of the movement.

2 Religion

The discourse on religious violence has substantially grown over the last decades. Although modernization and secularization theories have predicted that modernity would simultaneously mean a decrease in religious beliefs, scientific discourse now even states a global resurgence of religion (see Eisenstadt 2000; Hurd 2007; Klein Goldewijk 2007). The ambivalent relationship between religion and conflict remains a particularly interesting subject of study. Every religion has a basic principle of peace and harmony. Therefore a key element in religious warfare is how to correspond the need for violence with the commandment not to kill. On the one hand, the word of God brings grace and virtue to humankind, and religious calls for peace and harmony can serve in peace building. On the other hand, religious disputes can be a reason for conflict. Examples can be found throughout history throughout the world, like the Crusades, the Protestant revolts

in Europe in the 16th century and the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict to name just a few.

The role of religion in violent conflict has therefore been extensively researched. Statistical research has shown that when religion comes to define armed conflict, it makes the conflict more intractable (Tusicisny 2004), causes more suffering amongst civilian population (Toft 2007) are more intense (Pearce 2005 and Fox 2004) and are less likely to end through a negotiated settlement (Svensson 2007). Svensson states that when the claims and goals of a conflict have been based on religion, the likelihood of a negotiated settlement declines. He states that "[t]he increased subjective value and the lack of substitutes will create a perception of indivisibility" (2007, 932). However according to Svensson it is not the religious identity, but religious issues that make conflicts harder to settle through negotiation.

The way religious dimensions appear in armed conflict varies. A main distinction that appears in the literature is based on how religion relates to the claims of conflict parties. In his research to the effect of religion on the possibility of a negotiated settlement Svensson identifies a distinction in the belligerent claims between 'religious incompatibility' and 'religious dissimilarity' (2007, 936). Religious incompatibility directly relates to motivations and aspirations of the belligerent. In other words, the conflict issue is perceived by the belligerent in a religious framework. For example, when a belligerent defines its aspirations for war in the creation of a state or legislation on a religious basis it would be defined as a religious incompatibility.

When primary parties in a conflict do not frame their claims and motivations, but rather their group boundaries as religious, Svensson coded these conflicts as based on religious dissimilarity (2007, 936). Religious dissimilarity does not imply religious commitment but rather the identification of a group to one or different religions, either in the form of any of the major world traditions (Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism etc.) or major subgroups (Sunni or Shia Islam, Roman Catholic or Orthodox Christianity etc.)

Susanna Pearce makes a comparable distinction in her research to the relationship of religion with the intensity of violent conflict. In her research she makes a distinction between an identity-oriented view and an issue-oriented view (2005, 340). In other words, is religion the primary issue of the conflict or does religion draw the boundary between conflicting parties? Pearce's reasonable objection to the issue-oriented view, is that it is often difficult to establish certain main issues in a conflict since claims are often blurred by framing, propaganda or political consequences. The same problem emerges with the determination of primary goals of a conflict. Issues and goals can become more or less important over time, can be framed in a misleading way or can get intertwined.

Svensson and Pearce show that religious incompatibilities or religion related to issues cause conflict to be more intractable, more violent and less likely to end in negotiated settlement. However, the statistics did not show a noteworthy difference with 'regular' ethnic conflict when religion was related to identity. As we have seen in the previous paragraphs, the claims and motivations of the HSM were not directly related to religion, but were more political and framed in a religious discourse. The HSM nor the LRA are struggling for religious claims but are formed along ethnic lines framed in a religious discourse. The claims are based on ethnic marginalization placed in a context of a violent political history. Statistically seen, the involvement of religion in the conflict in northern Uganda would therefore not make it more intractable or more violent.

Next to the fact that religious identities do not create a harder to settle or more violent conflict, ethnicity and religion are often simultaneously present in the creation of identity boundaries. The definition of ethnicity by Smith (1986) already shows the overlap between religion and ethnicity by incorporating religion as part of ethnicity. In their addition to the handbook of ethnic conflict, Ruane and Todd (2011) investigate the relationship between ethnicity and religion. They

find that in practice, religion and ethnicity coincide in many ways. Many cases show a clear overlap between religion and ethnicity, for example the conflict in Northern Ireland or the Israel-Palestine conflict. In the sense of mobilization, religion and ethnicity can play a quite similar role. Ruane and Todd state that the fusion of religious and ethnic identity can be explained by processes of nation building along religious lines (2011, 71). For example, the religious wars in Europe can in many ways account for the map of Europe that we see today. In Africa we see that colonialism often went hand in hand with missionary work. The creation of a new state by colonizers gave rise to the opportunity of 'civilizing' the new people by means of the religion of the colonizer (Ruane and Todd 2011, 72). The case of northern Uganda is a clear example of the theory posed by Ruane and Todd that religion and ethnicity are often simultaneously present in the creation of identity boundaries.

The difference between the influence of ethnicity and religion in the bordering of a group could be seen in their static character. Although ethnicity is not a primordial fact, it is theoretically not possible to convert to a different ethnicity. Religious conversion is theoretically seen more likely. Therefore, ethnicity is perceived more static than religion. However, in practice, a change of ethnicity is indeed possible. Considering ethnicity - if we state that it is a social construct and not a primordial fact - it is possible to a certain extend to be flexible in ethnic identity. However, as we also established ethnicity is created in a dialectic formation between structure and agent, therefore the flexibility for the agent is fairly limited. Individuals have the choice between a set of different ethnicities, but this choice is limited by socially and politically defined ethnic categories (Nagel 1994, 156). In a situation of ethnic conflict, ethnicity gets more stigmatized as belonging to an ethnic group becomes a matter of life or death. However, in a state of violent conflict ethnic switching could also deliver a great advantage. Asserting a minority status or even changing ethnicity could deliver great advantages in a situation of politically regulated ethnic resource distribution (Nagel 1994, 160). Nagel calls this changing of ethnicity ethnic fraud.

Religious identity is perceived as less static since it is theoretically possible for a person to convert to another religion. However, Kaufman states that although religious conversion is possible, it rarely happens in practice (2011, 92). As the definition of Smith and Ruane and Todd have showed earlier, religion is highly intertwined with ethnic identity. Therefore, the conversion of religion is in practice much harder than it appears in theory. A change of religion will often entail a change of social environment, especially in a society where religious identities are highly stigmatized.

We have established that ethnicity and religion are in many ways similar in how they create identity boundaries. When the role of religion in violent conflict is dissimilar instead of incompatible and related to identity instead of to claims and motivations statistical research shows no noteworthy difference between religious and ethnic conflict. It is however very difficult to speak of a distinction between religious and ethnic conflict since religion and ethnicity are highly intertwined in the creation of identity. Although in theory religious conversion is possible and ethnic conversion not, in practice we see that religious conversion rarely happens and that ethnic conversion is possible. We can thus conclude that religion and ethnicity are not that different in their influence on the creation of identity boundaries. Religion does however create a new dimension to the ethnic conflict of Uganda that is in a large way responsible for the character of the LRA.

2.1 Messianism

In many ways ethnicity and religion are the same in how they influence identity boundaries. When we look at the constructivist school of thought, ethnicity and religion can both be the basis of the creation of an in- and out-group. By use of

ethnic myths values and origins embedded in an Africanized Christian tradition ethnicity and religion are mutually reinforcing in their creation of a group identity. However religion does add a different dimension to identity boundaries than ethnicity. The religious character of the Lord's Resistance Army works as a justification for war, since it will eventually lead to a better world.

Religions can be very persistent in their claim to the truth. Each main monotheistic religion claims to have a superior truth over any of the other. Within the main world religions the right interpretation of the truth forms a heated debate. However, within religions the right interpretation of the truth can also be the cause of division. Religious identity can thus create frictions between religions, but within religions as well. Religion can create strong sentiments of division in its claim on the truth, but can in the same way create a strong feeling of unity and belonging (Desplat 2005, 482-483). This again shows the ambivalent relationship between religion an conflict that I stated earlier.

Hasenclever and Rittberger (2000) state that when insurgency movements see themselves as the chosen people, the promises of a new world order forms a strong justification for war. People are more willing to make sacrifices in the light of promises of reward in the next world. As chosen people of God they see themselves as martyrs for the creation of a better world.

According to Behrend, the spirit Lakwena took possession of Alice to free the Acholi people from evil by purifying the Acholi society from witchcraft (1999, 24). The misfortune of the Acholi was often explained in an idiom of witchcraft. Witchdoctors were visited to cause misfortune to enemies by sending the vengeful spirit of a person who has died by violence, in Acholi called *kiroga* (Behrend, 27). Misfortune is therefore perceived as the act of an evil spirit *(cen)*. When a person was harmed by a spirit, suspicion rose to who might have sent that spirit. Accusations then turned into more feelings of hatred and mistrust and often led to new acts of *kiroga*.

It was also believed that when a combatant had killed an enemy, the *cen* of that person attached itself to the combatant. When this combatant then returned to Acholi it brought the *cen* of its former enemies with him (Behrend, 27). Behrend argues that, after Museveni had taken over power, many former soldiers of the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) fled back to the North taking *cen* with them. Both idioms of witchcraft complemented each other in the creation of an explanatory discourse for the misfortune in Acholi (Behrend 1999, 28). Fighting for the HSM therefore meant fighting to stop the misfortune of the Acholi people.

2.2 Transcending of ethnic boundaries

The HSMF were able to transcend some ethnic boundaries by means of a common religion. Ethnic differences could be overseen since the spirit Lakwena stood above human factionalism and human ties. Although the status of chosen people remained reserved for the Acholi, ethnicity was not a criteria for joining the HSMF. Although religion can be a very strong binding factor, it is not sufficient to surpass all the complex and historically enhanced ethnic boundaries.

Within the camps of the HSMF ethnic equality was valued very high. Even though the Acholi kept the status of chosen people, other privileges based on ethnicity were not allowed by the spirit Lakwena. The spirit also ordered the prohibition of ethnic languages and allowed only Kiswahili and English (Behrend 1999, 83). During the march on Kampala a shift in identity boundaries can be noticed. A shared feeling of deprivation framed by a shared religion made it possible to transcend ethnic boundaries between Acholi, Langi, Teso and Jo-Padhola. By the end of 1987 the largest part of the HSMF consisted of Teso (Behrend 1999, 67). However the creation of a new group also created new identity boundaries. The us versus them boundaries were no longer drawn along ethnic lines between people within northern Uganda, but were now drawn along

the division between northern Nilotic and southern Bantu people (Behrend 1999, 83,84). The defeat of the HSM was mainly caused by the failure of gaining popular support as they came closer to Kampala. The hostile treatment of the Busoga, who denied HSM soldiers resources and shelter, is by Behrend presented as one of the main reason for the collapse of the HSM (1999, 96).

The Holy Spirit Movement was not initialized as an insurgency movement, but as a religious movement to free the Acholi people from evil by battling external enemies as well as internal enemies. The intention of the movement was to spread the word of the Holy Spirits first amongst Acholi people but later throughout Uganda, Africa and even the rest of the World (Behrend, 56-57). This inclusivistic and messianistic character of the HSM caused it to transcend ethnic boundaries.

3 The Conflict from 1987 Onwards

After the defeat of the HSMF in 1987 and the peace treaty of 1988, the LRA emerged from the remnants of the HSMF and UDPA. The connection of LRA and part of the UDPA after the 1988 peace accords between UDPA and NRA is important in appreciating the changed nature of the LRA compared to the HSM. The non-purified soldiers of the UDPA were incorporated in the LRA and with that ended the internal battle against evil in Acholi. The joint forces of UDPA and HSM inspired Kony to favor standard guerilla tactics over the Holy Spirit Tactics set up by the HSM. Incorporating the tactics of the UDPA brought forward a military experience of using terror as an instrument of war (Van Acker 348). Since guerilla tactics base its success on blending in with the population, another side effect was that guerrilla tactics and terrorist strategies cause a fading of the distinctions between perpetrator-victim, soldier-civilian and rebels-government.

The relation between the HSM and the LRA is quite ambiguous. Kony claims to be Alice's cousin and that the spirit Lakwena has given him the order to take up arms as well. However Alice herself has always denied there was a direct link between the HSM and LRA (Behrend 1999, 86). The element of belief, however, remained important for the LRA. The divine element of the movement drives the rebels to a firm belief in their leader Kony. By introducing new spirits Kony claimed his supremacy over Alice. LRA also uses rituals to protect soldiers on the battlefield. If combatants are harmed it is not because of the failure of the LRA's tactics but a failure of the combatant to abide by the rules of the spirits.

The main parties to the conflict in northern Uganda have not changed since roughly 1988, however the character of these parties have. From 1994 onwards the character of the conflict changed to a great extend when the LRA received full scale support from Sudan. Since then the conflict has been embedded in regional tensions in the Great Lake District of Africa by Museveni's and the LRA's involvement in Congo and Sudan. The support of the Sudanese government to the LRA in return for their loyalty created an ideal situation for them. By supporting the LRA they could destabilize Museveni's power and could ask for support in their own counterinsurgency with the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/Army without getting their hands dirty. The government of Sudan supported the LRA with weaponry and allowed rear-bases in Sudanese territory from which the LRA could attack the SPLM/A as well as wreak havoc in Acholi to weaken Museveni's government. LRA was therefore to a much less extent dependent on popular support, and had very little need for winning hearts and minds. The function that the population usually serves in a classical guerilla war – namely to provide shelter and food – was now filled by the Sudanese government. Therefore, the incentive for the LRA to maintain a positive relation with the population has been highly diminished.

Since the need for voluntary popular support is less essential for the survival of the movement, the LRA uses abduction to fill up its ranks. For abducted child soldiers who are able to return from the horrors of the battlefield it

is proven to be a huge challenge to return to civilian life (Annan, Amuge and Angwaro 2003, 236-237). The conflict therefore creates again a generation of former combatants who are faced with the enormous challenge to deal with the militarization of society.

Conclusion

Identity boundaries are created in a dialectical process between structure and agency. Ethnicity is not a primordial fact, nor is it a frame created by elites for personal gain, but a social construct rooted in historical narratives. The creation of an ethnic group identity alone is however not sufficient to lead to ethnic conflict. As we have seen in the definition of ethnic conflict by Wolff and Cordell, ethnic conflict is rooted in the fact that a group feels marginalized by means of their distinct ethnic identity. On top of that, Nagel shows that the politicalization of ethnic boundaries results in very strong identity boundaries. When policies are implemented on the basis of an ethnic distinction, the importance of belonging to a certain ethnic group increases. In northern Uganda we see that politics and ethnicity are strongly related. The distinct ethnic identity of the Acholi people is framed by historical grievances of ethnic marginalization during colonial times and in the state building process of postcolonial times. Especially in the period after the British rule, political power was established in a recurring process of violence and counter violence along ethnic lines. Ethnic groups became a strong tool for political support. This process strongly relates ethnic identity to political power, which is a clear example of Nagel's theory.

Although ethnic marginalization is a strong incentive for ethnic conflict, we see that two other important factors contribute to the process of ethnic identity boundaries resulting in ethnic conflict. During the process of state building we also see the development of what van Acker calls a lumpen militariat class. Due to the role that ethnic violence has played in Ugandan history, many people have made a livelihood out of being employed in the military. After political stability had returned, it was often difficult for these people to return to peasant life, as shown by Behrend and Van Acker. The ongoing violence has therefore created a militarized class that faced great challenges in returning to civilian life. The militarization of society combined with the strong ethnic identity boundaries formed a very fertile base for mobilization for violent action. These factors combined lead to the creation of strong historically and politically enhanced ethnic identity boundaries, resulting in violent conflict by means of a lumpen militariat class and effective mobilization.

Next to ethnicity, religious identity also plays a large role in the conflict in northern Uganda. Can we see a difference between identity boundaries created by religion and identity boundaries created by ethnicity? As shown by Svensson, Pearce and Fox, the of religion in violent conflict can lead to conflicts that are more intractable, more violent and less likely to settle through a negotiated settlement. However, religion can either relate to issues, claims and goals - for example the creation of a religious state – or to the creation of a group identity. Svensson and Pearce have shown that when religion relates to identity it results in religious dissimilarities or an identity oriented view. In northern Uganda we see that neither the HSMF nor the LRA are fighting for religious claims or goals, but that religion is used to define the insurgency group. According to Svensson, Pearce and Fox, the role of religion in the conflict in northern Uganda would therefore not create any differences in relation to the role of ethnicity.

Next to that, Ruane and Todd have also shown that ethnic and religious identity often overlap. Religion is often a part of ethnic identity, as we can also see in the definition of ethnicity by Smith. A difference between religion and ethnicity can be seen in the idea that ethnicity seems more static than religion. In popular perception it seems easier to convert to another religion than to convert to another ethnicity. However, since religion and ethnicity are strongly related, a

religious conversion is harder in practice than it seems and quite rare. On top of that, ethnic conversion is not impossible since it is not a primordial fact but a creation of structure and agent. An agent is therefore in certain ways able to adjust his ethnicity.

Although ethnicity and religion are in many ways alike in how they create ethnic identity boundaries, in the conflict in northern Uganda we see that religious identity does create a different dimension to the ethnic conflict. The messianistic aspect of religion creates a strong faith in a better world. Hassenclever and Rittberger have shown that people are more willing to make sacrifices when they see themselves as the chosen people to create a better world. In northern Uganda we see that the HSMF as well as the LRA use religion to justify war in view of a better world.

The religious group identity in northern Uganda was also able to transcend ethnic boundaries within the northern and eastern part of the country. Especially in the HSMF, a shared religion was valued higher than a shared ethnicity. Within the camps of the HSMF measures were being taken to assure that ethnic differences would not create divisions. However, that does not mean that religious group identity always surpasses ethnic identity since the HSMF was not able to transcend the ethnic boundary between North and South.

After the defeat of the HSMF and the split of the UDPA, some changes must be noticed in the character of the conflict. Since the involvement of the LRA in regional conflicts, the need for popular support by winning hearts and minds has strongly decreased. Although this does not mean that there is no popular support whatsoever, the need to advocate for support as the HSMF did is much lower. Next to that, the incorporation of the former UDPA soldiers who did not agree with the 1988 peace accords ended Alice's battle against the internal evil within Acholi. The use of religious and ethnic identity boundaries in the LRA is therefore different from the HSMF.

In conclusion, we can state that in theory there is no clear difference between the influence of religion and ethnicity on the creation of identity boundaries. Since religion and ethnicity are strongly intertwined in their creation of identity, we cannot see a difference between their influences in the creation of a group identity. However, that does not mean that religion has no influence whatsoever. In northern Uganda we see that religion influences the feeling of the group through its messiansitic and inclusivistic character. Although these influences cannot be constituted as a distinction between the influence of religion and ethnicity on the creation of identity boundaries, it does create a new dimension to an ethnic conflict.

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