The Role of Stigma in the Reintegration and Psychosocial Adjustment among Formerly Abducted Children in Northern Uganda

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Prologue

Completing research in northern Uganda with an amazing team around me, was an absolute unforgettable and great experience. Doing research among the Acholi people makes you a very lucky person! All the returnees, family and community members, were all unique, welcoming people. Meeting these wonderful people who were open to tell me their often sad and emotional experiences in their time with the LRA or after the LRA at home, is something that I appreciate very much and I am very thankful that these people were willing to open up to me. Thank you all very much.

This research would have not been possible without the tremendous support from Victor Oloya. I cannot thank him enough for everything he has done for me. Victor was initially my translator and "boda boda" driver to the villages in Gwengdiya, but soon he also became a very good friend, with whom I had so much fun all the hours together on the boda, having lunch together, partying together. And besides all the fun times, Victor was always there when I had some (logistical) problems; he was there to help me. Moreover, I want to thank Victor for all the really good conversations. He taught me a lot about the conflict in northern Uganda gave me many new insights and was a great narrator. Victor, thank you so much for everything you have done for me!

I was a very lucky researcher since I worked not only with Victor, but also with Opio Remis. I want to thank Opio so much for organising and facilitating all the interview sessions, the focus group discussions, the drawing sessions. Without his assistance it would not have been possible to talk to such a large group of returnees and their families and community members. I know that it was not always easy what I asked him to organise, but amazingly, he always made it and made my work go smoothly! Remis, thank you for your endless perseverance and good spirit!

I want to thank my partner Jobert Winkel for all his support, endless patience and just being there for me. Thank you Jobert. And I could not have done this research without the moral and financial support of my parents. I want to thank them very much. And of course, I want to thank my supervisor, Mario Fumerton, for his guidance throughout the year.

Evelyn G.W. Kaizer

List of abbreviations

CAR   Central African Republic

DDR   Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration

DRC   Democratic Republic of the Congo

FAC   Formerly Abducted Children

GHRV   Gross Human Rights Violations

GUSCO   Gulu Support the Children Organisation

IDP   Internally Displaced People

LRA   Lord's Resistance Army

NGO   Non-Governmental Organisation

UPDF   Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF)

WACA   War Affected Children's Assocation

Contents

Introduction

More than 300,000 children under the age of eighteen are fighting as soldiers with government forces and armed opposition groups in more than thirty countries worldwide (Cortes & Buchanan 2007: 43; Hughes 2000: 399; Vautravers 2009: 96; Wessels 2000: 407). Most child soldiers are in developing countries with the worst situation in Sub-Saharan Africa, where two-thirds of the armed conflicts take place (Vautravers 2009: 96). These children are forced to perpetrate atrocities upon others (Cortes and Buchanan 2007: 43).

In northern Uganda the Lords's Resistance Army (LRA) has been active in northern Uganda from 1986 until the ceasfire in 2006. The LRA is led by Joseph Kony, who is believed by many Acholi to be possessed by spirits. The predecessor of the LRA is the Holy Spirit Movement led by Alice Lakwena who set it up in november 1986. [1] For twenty-three years the LRA was in conflict with the government of Uganda, which had devastating effects on civilians within northern Uganda, leaving ninety per cent of the population dislocated, in many cases forced by the government, into Internally Displaced Person's (IDP) camps. Among the IDPs violence, endemic diseases, neglect, and extreme poverty lead to approximately 1,000 deaths per week. And also in this war over 30,000 children and youth have been abducted by the LRA and forced to become soldiers and/or sex slaves.[2] And an unknown number of children and youth have joined the militias from the Ugandan government (UPDF) to fight the LRA (Baines 2005: 11; 2007: 4; 2010: 410). There is a large amount of variation in abduction experiences. Most of the abductees have witnessed or participated in crimes and violence such as looting, beating, killing and raping. Male and female abductees were often used as soldiers, cooks and guards and female abductees were also often given to soldiers or their commanders as "forced wives".[3] Since 2006 a ceasefire is signed between Joseph Kony from the LRA

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[1] For more information on the Holy Spirit Movement led by Alice Lakwena, I recommend the book: Behrend, Heike. 1991. *Alice Lakwena & the Holy Spirits. War in Northen Uganda 1986-1997.* Munich: Trickster.

[2] Studies even mention numbers of 60,000 abducted children and youth by the LRA (Annan, Brier & Aryemo 2009: 642)

[3] This information was confirmed by all of my respondents, February-May 2011, Gwengdiya

and the Ugandan government and since 2007 people are moving back from the IDP camps to their homes of origin (Annan, Brier & Aryemo 2009: 642).[4]

Previous research has focused on the mental health outcomes of children who have participated in the war. These studies focused on returnees who were staying in reception centres or who had just recently come back home. These studies merely focused on the relation between mental health and the impact of violence that formerly abducted children (FAC) endured. Mental health problems were found as post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, other anxiety disorders, and depression among FACs were found. For example the study by Derluyn and colleagues found among seventy-one former abductees post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms (2004: 862). This was confirmed by results from Bayer, Klasen and Adam (2007: 558) and Okello, Onen and Musisi (2007: 228). These are studies that focused mainly on the relation between returnees and PTSD symptoms; however, other studies are there that indicate higher prevalence rates among returnees for depression and anxiety (Khort et al. 2008: 696; Okello, Onen and Musisi 2007: 228).

All the previous mentioned studies were completed relatively soon after the return of the FACs from the bush. However, within these studies there is a substantial variability in these outcomes across different settings that suggest that long-term psychosocial adjustment is not only influenced by past war experiences, but also by post-conflict factors (Betancourt et al. 2010*a*: 17-18).[5]

Only few studies focused on the long-term psychosocial well-being of FACs. One of the first studies that looked at the long-term impact of the participation of children in armed conflict and processes of mental health adjustment was performed by Boothby who followed thirty-nine male FACs from Mozambique over a period of sixteen years (2006: 246). The results from this study suggest that the majority of the FACs made significant progress in returning to civilian life, however, none were able to fully escape from their violent pasts. Overall, the psychological distress symptoms

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[4] For more information on the background of the conflict in northern Uganda, I recommend two books: Finnström, Sverker. 2008. *Living with Bad Surroundings. War, History, and Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda.*Durham and London: Duke University Press. The second book is: Allen, Tim and Vlassenroot, Koen. 2010. *The Lord's Resistance Army. Myth and Reality.* London and New York: Zed Books.

[5] In this research I will utilize Betancourt and colleagues' definition for 'psychosocial adjustment': psychosocial adjustment refers to an adaptation of the psychological and social effects. These two terms are related and continuously influencing each other. The 'psychological effects' refer to those that affect emotion, behaviour, thoughts, memory, perceptions and understanding. The 'social effects' refer to changes relationships due to death, separation, damage to social values and the destruction of social values and customary practices (2008*a*: 14).

persisted, however, the number of FACs experiencing them as adults, was considerable low compared to what they experienced as children (Boothby 2006: 250). However, in contrast to these results the study by Kohrt and colleagues in Nepal found contradictory results. Kohrt and colleagues state that poor psychosocial adjustment persisted among returnees compared to the control group even after having adjusted for exposure to violence (2008: 701). Kohrt and colleagues speculated that these outcomes were influenced by experiences of discrimination or stigma. FACs that return to their communities may face stigma from families or community members *due to perceptions that these children are immoral and dangerous.*

Therefore, *stigma* could be an important factor that influences the psychosocial adjustment of FACs and it can be seen as an important aspect of understanding how psychosocial adjustment of FACs still continues after the war. Stigma can often occur with experiences of discrimination. And previous research has shown a relation between discrimination and poor mental health outcomes (Fisher, Wallace & Fenton 2003: 690; Klonoff, Landrine & Ullman 1999: 336; Rumbaut 1994: 771-773). However, not much research has been done on the relation between discrimination and mental health outcomes among FACs. Knowledge on this relation is important, since Annan and colleagues have shown that a minority group of FACs, who had experienced poor community acceptance, were three times more likely to exhibit negative social behaviours (2007 in Betancourt et al. 2010*a*: 19).

In addition to the negative factors influencing the psychosocial adjustment, a relation has been found between protective factors and mental health outcomes. Betancourt and colleagues have found that family support and community acceptance can decrease the effects of the war experiences on the psychosocial adjustment; the risks of negative psychosocial outcomes reduced (2010*b*: 1089). And the family and community acceptance can lead to successful reintegration (Betancourt et al. 2008*b*: 581; Boothby, Crawford & Halperin 2006: 91).

It would seem, therefore, that the impact of stigma varies due to protective resources such as family and community acceptance. Moreover, stigma seems to vary by context (Betancourt 2010*a*: 18). Annan, Blattman and Horton found that the acceptance of FACs in families differentiated from acceptance in communities. More concretely, they found more family acceptance than community acceptance among male FACs in northern Uganda: one per cent of the respondents noted an

unwelcoming return within the family and nearly twenty-five per cent reported community stigma. Data was collected in eight sub-counties in the districts of Kitgum and Pader in northern Uganda, therefore making generalizations for the whole Acholi population must be done with caution (2006: 66). This community stigma is also presented in Betancourt and colleagues' research in Sierra Leone (2008*b*: 576). Short term Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programmes prepare former abductees for their return to their homes, i.e. reunification with remaining family members and communities. The ex-combatants were told that the acts committed during the war were not their fault; however, the day-to-day experiences with others in the communities reminded the FACs that the war experiences were not forgotten in the community and often the initial response was one of fear and distrust (Betancourt et al. 2008*b*: 576).

Current Research

Research has been done on the role that stigma has on long-term psychosocial adjustment. Betancourt and colleagues have done the only empirical research that examined this relation in Sierra Leone (2010*a:* 19). They found a subsequent association between the post-conflict factor stigma and psychosocial adjustment. Stigma that manifested through perceived discrimination had a significant relation with the four components of psychosocial adjustment: depression and anxiety, pro-social behaviour, confidence and hostility over time, independent from the war experiences. Results on protective factors were also found; an association was found between higher baseline community acceptance and higher levels of pro-social behaviour. Also an increase in family acceptance was inversely related to hostility.

Due to the fact that Betancourt and colleagues have done the only empirical research on the relation between stigma and psychosocial adjustment, it seems essential that future research in post-conflict regions in the world needs to focus more on this relation. And since this research is done in Sierra Leone it is interesting to see whether the FACs in northern Uganda are facing similar issues and have similar associations as found in Sierra Leone. Besides this, northern Uganda's war history with more than 30,000 formerly abducted children, it is crucial for DDR programmes to know more about the reintegration of northern Ugandan returnees. And not only for the northern Ugandan returnees more specific knowledge is

necessary, currently the LRA is still active in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Central African Republic (CAR) and Darfur, where children are still abducted everyday (Perez 2011: 16).[6] Furthermore, to understand the reintegration and the psychosocial adjustment outcomes of FACs on the long-term, it is important to identify the role of post-conflict factors, and in particularly the role of stigma, on FACs.

This leads to the following main research question:

What role does stigma have in the reintegration and psychosocial adjustment among formerly abducted children in northern Uganda?

In order to study this main research question, I have the following goals for my research: first to explore if and how the FACs reintegrated with their families and in their communities, second to explore if the FACs experience stigma from their family or community members; and if they do, *what* forms are experienced, third to explore what the degree of psychosocial adjustment is of the FACs and fourth to combine the data from the previous three questions and then try to answer the question how stigma plays a role in the social reintegration and psychosocial adjustment process for the FACs.

In this thesis, I have deliberately chosen to use the terms abductee, former abducted child or returnee, and because in the interviews with my respondents it came generally forward that they did not want to be associated with the term former child soldiers. They did not see themselves as soldiers since they were abducted and forced to join the LRA. Therefore they want to be named former abductee or returnee.

Methodology

Research was carried out in Gwengdiya, Awach sub-county in northern Uganda. Gwengdiya is a village thirty-four kilometres above Gulu town where many children were abducted in the years that the LRA was active in northern Uganda. The focus of this research is based on returnees and their family and community members from the parish Gwengdiya. And because of academic significance it is necessary to build

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6 Interview with Ojok, FAP, Gwengdiya, 12 April 2011

trust with my respondents in order to get more insight in their relations. Trust is built because of the nearly everyday presence of me as a researcher. The field work for this research took place between February and May 2011. Throughout, assistance was received from a translator who was fluent in the local language, Acholi Luo, and was knowledgeable about the local cultural practices, and assistance was also given by my research assistant who facilitated all the interview appointments.

This research is qualitative and data is gathered using different data collection methods. First, semi-structured interviews were done with twenty-three FACs (with an additional of thirteen in-depth interviews), followed by ten interviews with family members, nine with community members and two with employees at reception centres. Furthermore, I organised three focus group discussions with the male and female FACs and the elders. I have transcribed all the interviews, followed by an analysis through a coding system related to the topics. I conducted interviews with FACs who were in captivity for a period ranging from two months to twelve years. And because this research focuses on stigma, reintegration and psychosocial adjustment which are all long processes, I chose to interview respondents who were back from the bush already some time. My respondents were abducted and captivated approximately at the beginning of the year 2000.

The sampling method that I have used is 'a simple sampling method'. My research assistant, who was a FAC himself and who lived in the area where my research took place, identified the FACs for my sample. A selection was made of the random sample on gender, age and duration of captivity in the bush. I was selective to gain an actual representation of the population. Since the themes of my research are sensitive (especially psychosocial adjustment and stigma), I found it of significance importance for the quality of my research to create *trust* between me as a researcher and my respondents to avoid response bias in the interviews. Trust was built because I focused on the parish Gwengdiya, of the sub-county Awach in northern Uganda. I was present every two days in Gwengdiya, where I also spent significant time on the central market talking to people from the community. Through this, people could get used to my presence and this could create trust between me and the respondents. Because I chose to focus on one parish, the data collection method is limited, therefore generalisations about FACs from other regions in northern Uganda and in general, should be done with great caution. However,

due to trust between the researcher and the respondent, I expect the interviews to be more qualitative with less response bias.

Two rounds of semi-structured interviews were done with the FACs; the first round I interviewed twenty-three FACs who were all under-aged when they were abducted by the LRA. Additionally to the first interviews, I have done with thirteen of the twenty-three respondents in-depth interviews. Both rounds of interviews were semi-structured. The first and second round of interviews corresponded with each other, since the two interviews followed each other chronologically. In the first round of interviews I mainly focused on their experiences in the LRA and about the period after the LRA when they came to the reception centre or went home. The second in-depth interview continued on the first interview and focused more on the current situation of the returnee. Also the questions were more sensitive in the second interview, since I asked more in-depth questions on particular topics that came up in the first interview. These also contained sensitive issues (i.e. asking more in-depth question about family and community issues). It was good to have two interview rounds, since the respondents talked more openly and freely compared to the first interview, which can be attributed to the creation of trust between us two.

The first interview started with general questions about their period in the LRA (i.e. how did you join the LRA? What were your activities? Can you describe a day in the LRA?). The second part focused on the reintegration with the family and the community (i.e. how did your family react when you came back home? Were there some people may be not so nice to you when you came home? Were there rituals used when you came home?) The third part was about the period after the LRA and their lives in the community with their families (i.e. are you included in family/community activities? Are you excluded from family/community activities? How do you feel with the family whom you live with now? Do you get the same opportunities as other relatives? How do you see your future?). I always ended the interviews with more neutral topics, i.e. how many children do they have, what do they do in the time when they do not have to work on the land, with who do they live, to give the respondents a good feeling when I left. However, and unfortunately, I did not always manage to achieve this, because the topics we were talking about were often difficult and sensitive, which some times had emotional consequences. I did not persuade any of my informants for the interview and I always gave them the

opportunity to change the topic, to have a break or halt the interview. I deliberately chose to end the interview with a neutral topic (i.e. non-war related and non-relational issues) to avoid leaving the interviewee in a sad and depressed mood, but in stead with a good mood.

Since I am focusing in this research on stigma and reintegration, the community and family members are important actors who need to be taken into account in order to gain more insights in stigma and reintegration. A number of community members were randomly selected and were asked general questions amongst others about their perceptions of FACs, their families, and their relations with community members. Other community members I spoke to were not randomly selected, but were people who were mentioned by the FACs as people who used to or still stigmatise the FACs. Family members were chosen to be interviewed, by looking at the personal situation of the FAC. For instance, it was looked at who was present at the time when the returnee came back home and who lives currently with the respondent. Both of these family members were interviewed.

In the Acholi culture, reintegration and rehabilitation takes mainly place with rituals. The rituals are performed by the local counsels or local chiefs within a community. In order to gain more insight in these practices and to gain more general background information, I interviewed these local counsels and local chiefs. Also non-governmental organisations played a big role in rehabilitating and reintegrating the FACs after they had escaped or were freed by the LRA. Therefore, I interviewed the main rehabilitation centres in Gulu town where most of the FACs were brought to; World Vision and Gulu Support the Children Organisation (GUSCO). These organisations gave me more information about their programmes, reunification strategies and reintegration and rehabilitation methods.

The second data collection technique I used was a visual and creative method: drawing. I asked the thirteen respondents who I interviewed a second time to draw for me in order to gain more information about their period in captivity and their period after their escape. The reason why I wanted them to draw for me besides the interviews was to see if more information would come forward through the drawing compared to the interview. Since almost all of my respondents stopped primary school when they were in grade three or four and with the experience to never or hardly find drawing materials in people's homes, I was aware of the fact that these

respondents had may be never or almost never drawn before. However, the drawing went well, the respondents were able to express themselves through a drawing. I gained a lot of information through this technique, which was valuable extra knowledge to the information which I gained through the interviews. Five subjects were asked to be drawn from the FAC: how were they mainly treated in the LRA. Secondly, how did this treatment make them feel? Thirdly, how do you see yourself? Fourthly, what do you consider as home? And fifthly, can you draw the people (family and/ or community members) who help you with your everyday life and are close to you in the circle, and can you draw the people who are unfriendly and / or hostile to you outside of the circle.

Another data collection technique that I used was literature review. I read an extensive amount of literature on the northern Ugandan conflict, the developments of the country and on stigma, the reintegration process and the psychosocial adjustment of FACs in post-conflict regions. I completed a critical literature review in which I have analysed and compared the findings to prevent the possibility of "confirmation bias". This literature helped me to prepare me for the interviews with the FACs and to write this thesis.

And the last technique to collect data to investigate the psychosocial adjustment of FACs, I used the questionnaire by MacMulin and Loughry (2004) the Northern Uganda Child Psychosocial Adjustment Scale (NUCPAS). This questionnaire has four sub-scales with fifty-three items to measure the degree of psychosocial adjustment: Anxiety and depression (i.e. Do you have trouble in your heart? Do you have nightmares), pro-social behaviour (i.e. Are you ready to work with others? Do you enjoy telling stories with friends and family in the evening?), hostility (i.e. Do you destroy things that belong to others? Are you quarrelsome?) and confidence (i.e. Do you have confidence in your future? Are you satisfied with yourself?). For each question responses were scored on a 1 – 4 scale, ranging from "never" = 1. "rarely" = 2, "sometimes" = 3, "always" = 4. After filling in the questionnaire I asked more in-depth questions to gain more knowledge about responses FACs gave. This information was often valuable and relevant since additional information came forward, compared to the semi-structured interviews. In some situations contradictory answers were given to for example the follow up questions on the questionnaire compared to the questions in the semi-structured interviews. These

contradictions were generally based on expressing themselves continuously in the present tense, even though they may talk about the past. Confusion sometimes occurred, however, with additional direct and concrete questions, the confusion was solved.

Chapter Outline

Chapter one analyses the reintegration process of formerly abducted children. Reintegration into family and community occurs through a reconstruction of identity boundaries that lie between FACs and family and community members. This reconstruction of identity boundaries occurs through traditional and non-traditional mechanisms which are all described and analysed.

Chapter two focuses on the forms of stigma experienced by the FACs. An analysis of the concept stigma is made. This is followed by an examination of the forms of stigma that exist in the Acholi culture. And an extensive study is completed on the experiences of the returnees on the different components of stigma (discrimination, negative stereotyping, devaluation and social exclusion).

The third and last chapter examines the degree of psychosocial adjustment of returnees. This will be followed by an analysis of the determinants (negative as protective factors are discussed) of the psychosocial adjustment.

The thesis will finalise with a conclusion where the results from the previous three chapters are put together in order to answer the main research question: "what the role is of stigma in the reintegration and the psychosocial adjustment of formerly abducted children?". In the conclusion a discussion will also be presented on the limitation and lessons learned from this research.

Chapter One

From 'Recruit' to 'Rebel' to 'Returnee': Reintegration through Relational Identities

"When I came back, the elder saw that I stayed for years in the bush. Because I passed through bad things in the bush, they had to do traditional cleansing. They slaughtered a goat and told me to step on the blood of the goat. And when they ate the meat of the goat, they washed the hands with water and poured the water over me. This is the process of cleansing."[7]

1.1 Introduction

When FACs from northern Acholi districts escaped (eighty per cent of those who returned), or were rescued (fifteen per cent) or released (five per cent) from the LRA, half of them passed through a formal reintegration centre, i.e. World Vision or Gulu Support the Children Organisation (GUSCO). Others went directly home to their families (Allen & Schomerus 2006: 96).

Returning from the battlefield, most FACs will reintegrate back into their civilian lives. This chapter will focus on the reintegration process of the returnees. In this chapter I suggest that returnees adapt their identities to their surroundings, later I will refer to this as identity being related to the 'community of practice'. In this chapter I will discuss the different mechanisms, both traditional and non-traditional, through which FACs reconstruct the identity boundaries that lie between the FACs and the community members. The reconstruction of identity boundaries leads to reintegration in the community. Only the cultural mechanisms and reception centres brought up by the respondents will be analysed here.

To understand the concept of reconstructing identity boundaries, one must first understand the construction of these boundaries; therefore I will explore the identity transitions for FACs from their pre-abduction to the forced abduction, followed by an exploration of the identity transition from forced abduction to reintegration in the community through traditional mechanisms and reception centres.

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[7] Interview with Adong, FAP, Gwengdiya, 16 March 2011

1.2 Identity and Conflict: Relational Identity

The LRA mostly utilised the strategy to abduct children in the evening. These children were removed from their communities of origin and forced to participate in the daily routines and activities of the rebel group; activities as looting, killing and abducting were common practices.[8] Captivity could last for months or years and in the LRA the abducted children were socialised into a violent environment with the norms and practices of the LRA. As Staub argues, even if the children have been pressured to participate in acts of violence, children are likely to experience that participation as integral to their identities (1989 in Veale & Stavrou 2007: 276).

The change in identity from the abductees will be explained through the analysis based on a socio-cultural perspective of identity. Identity is in this perspective related to participation in *communities of practice*. The communities of the abductees' origin and the 'community' of the LRA, could be conceptualised as different communities with different roles, relations, structures and activities. These 'communities of practices' are socio-culturally organised places of shared knowledge characterised by evolving membership: newcomers move through situated learning from being novices to more expert participants (Lave & Wenger 1991: 2). A defining characteristic of communities of practice is a process Lave and Wenger call "legitimate peripheral participation" (1991: 29):

"Legitimate peripheral participation provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artefacts, and community's knowledge and practice. <u>It concerns the process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice.</u>" (Lave & Wenger 1991: 29. Emphasis added)

The newcomer, in this case the abductee, is in a peripheral position and through participation in the daily life and social interactions of the group the abductee gains cultural knowledge, becomes more skilled and then becomes in the position of fuller participation. This learning trajectory leads amongst others to a change in identity. Furthermore, power relations and structural organisations influence the participation of the newcomer in communities of practices. Newcomers need the participants who are older and more experienced for information, resources and opportunities for

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[8] Interview with Otto, FAP, 3 and 9 March 2011, in Gwengdiya

participation. The new individual must engage in the field of practice that is modelled by experienced practitioners, in order for the newcomer to copy and gain future identities (Veale & Stavrou 2007: 277). From the above mentioned terms, identity is relational and can be explored through daily activities and social relations in practice.

1.2.1   Reconstruction of the Identity 'Citizen' to 'Recruit': the Abduction

In the interviews with the returnees, the time before the abduction and the abduction were explained. The following examples good reflections of the responses from all the returnees I interviewed:

"The life before my abduction was not good, because you had to take care of the rebels. Always you had to hide from home."[9]

"During the war before my abduction life was not easy, it was difficult, because people were forced to go to the IDP camp and, really, there was no food. The main problem was [lack of] food."[10]

"The [LRA] came home at night, in the evening they abducted me from home. My mother and my elder sisters [were there]. Nothing happened to them; the rebels took food and clothes [and] the two of us were abducted: me and my sister."[11]

"That day [of the abduction] it was at night when we went to sleep. We slept in the bush and we came back in the morning. In the morning I got some water to wash my face. When I came out of the house I saw many gunmen. They came and got me, my father and my mother. They ordered us to come out. They told my father to sit down, when my mother came they also told my mother to sit down, when I came out they told me to go and join other people whom they had been walking with. So I went. At that time we immediately started walking. (…) I saw many things: people were beaten, people were abducted and I saw a man who was abducted at the same place [I was abducted] and he was killed."[12]

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[9] Interview with Odoch, Gwengdiya, 4 May 2011

[10] Interview with Ojara, Gwengdiya, 4 May 2011

[11] Interview with Adoch, Gwengdiya, 3 March 2011

[12] Interview with Alanyo, Gwengdiya, 3 March 2011

"I was in Awach secondary school which was transferred to Gulu town because of the rebel insurgency. I joined the school and I went with a lot of food items, but the food got finished from the school. So I decided to go home to get more, but before I reached home I met with the rebels and they abducted me."[13]

Within all the above mentioned quotes there is a positioning from the self with family, home, school, or daily tasks, and the LRA as "they" and "the rebels". And as Veale and Stavrou state, the abduction of children is a military strategy, it is not a strategy to abduct the individual specifically, but it is a strategy that is used by the LRA as a social control of the collective Acholi society. This creation of fear dominates people's daily lives (2007: 281).

1.2.2   Relational Identity and Initiation into the Lord's Resistance Army

From the interviews from my respondents, I see a process of systematic breaking down of their identity from its community of origin in the first weeks in the LRA. The first days and weeks the abductees live in continuous fear due to being beaten, watching people being killed, or being obliged to kill and not knowing if you will be killed yourself. For example, as Oryema, who was abducted when he was six years old, describes how newly abductees, recruits, were treated:

"If you are newly recruited, they give you heavy luggage to carry and they beat and punish you properly. (…) The life there was not easy because I was forced to do things which were not in my interest. Like I was forced to loot food, to beat people, even to attack people. So they were telling us, "if anyone tries to escape he will be killed". For example like there was a boy who escaped with a Walky Talky from one of the LRA officers. He escaped and came back and stayed at GUSCO. Then after GUSCO he was taken back home, unfortunately he was caught again by the LRA. Than they punishment him [for escaping]; they tied him with a rope and after that they made a very big fire and then they threw him there."[14]

Adong talks about her first experiences in the LRA as a recruit:

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[13] Interview with Opio, FAC, Gwengdiya, 11 March 2011

[14] Interview with Oryema, FAP, Gwengdiya, 12 April 2011

"The life [in the LRA] was very hard. Always fighting, eating bad food and walking for long distances. Sometimes they kill people when you see that they are killing people. [The two of us] were abducted: me and my sister. My sister was killed. They told us to kill my sister, so we killed her. I did it because I was ordered to do it. And if I was not going to do it, they were going to kill me."[15]

"Life was difficult because you had to loot food from the civilians, you had to abduct people and kill people (…). In our group, the newly abducted, we were nineteen. The majority of the newly abducted friends of mine were abducted and were killed. We remained only [with the] three [of us]."[16]

From these quotes the fear of being killed, the social isolation through killing your own sister and hereby breaking the bonds with home, the powerlessness to do everything the rebels tell you to do come clearly forward. Also the distinction between the recruits and rebels is feasible. In all quotes the FACs still use "us", as newly abducted children and "them" the LRA soldiers and commanders. The identity boundary between newly abducted and soldier is clear.

1.2.3   Reconstruction of the Identity 'Recruit' to 'Rebel': Becoming a Soldier

Almost immediately when a child is abducted it receives military training in the LRA. From the interviews I conducted, there seems to be a shift in the transition of identity when the FACs receive military training; the identity of the abductee tends to change from being a recruit into being a soldier.

"I was trained how to shoot a gun and how to launch an attack."[17]
"So a fighter was to do the ambush launching, to be on standby, waiting for the attack."[18]

In the military training, abductees who are forced to kill, cross the identity boundary from a civilian 'who cannot kill' to a soldier 'who beats, loots, rapes and kills". In this process of becoming a soldier in the LRA, Kelman describes that people who commit

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[15] Interview with Adong, FAP, Gwengdiya, 16 April 2011

[16] Interview with Ojara, FAP, Gwengdiya, 16 March 2011

[17] Interview with Trinity, FAP, Gwengdiya, 24 February 2011

[18] Interview with Ojara, FAP, Gwengdiya, 4 May 2011

Gross Human Rights Violations (GHRV) go through several social process: authorization, routinisation and dehumanisation (1989: 16-19). In an authority situation individuals feel obligated to obey the orders of the authority, whether or not they correspond with their own preferences. These individuals perceive not to have an own choice and therefore accept the legitimacy of the orders and of the authorities who give them. Routinisation reduces the moral resistance to the particular task by turning the action into routine. Through the process of routinisation, the action of for example killing becomes normalised. The last process is dehumanisation. As the victims are dehumanised by the perpetrator, then the usual principles of morality no longer apply (Kelman & Hamilton 1989: 16-19). The following quotes illustrate that the FACs to have a transition in their identities from being a recruit to being a soldier:

There was a time when we closed all the roads, people could not move with the car or go anywhere. There was a time when we went to Sudan to get bullets. So we brought the bullets, we came through Biabia, to Atiak and then we made an ambush. There came a big lorry from Mojo district, it was full with civilians. Then we shot the lorry and out of many people we killed most of them and many of them were wounded. Only two survived: a very young baby, which was seven months old and an old man who was cripple, he survived without any bullet shot."[19]

From the above mentioned quotes, there has been a change in the perception of the identity of the abductee. Instead of talking about "us" as abductees and "them" as soldiers and commanders, the respondents use "we" and "us" when talking about the activities that soldiers and commanders did in the LRA and "they" and "them" are used when talking about civilians. The identity of the abductee has changed from recruit to soldier.

1.3 Reintegration of Returnees

A core challenge for FACs and families and community members, is when the FAC has escaped or was released or rescued and comes back home, then the 'renegotiation of identity' starts (Veal & Stavrou 2007: 286). Renegotiating the

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[19] Interview with Ocora, FAP, Gwengdiya, 12 April 2011

identity refers to the process where the returnee faces the challenge to change its identity of a soldier into an identity of a civilian. In stead of being part of the group boundary "us" of the LRA soldiers and "them" being the civilians, the returnee needs to undergo an identity transition and cross the identity boundary to becoming a civilian again. This renegotiation of the identity takes place in the reintegration process. A reintegration process is a process in which people, who have been associated with fighting forces, are assisted to return to the civilian life as valuable and productive members of society (Allen & Schomerus 2006: 4)

In the following section the different reintegration mechanisms (receptions centres and traditional rituals) will be analyzed that contribute to the transition of the identity of the returnee, which consequently leads to the reintegration of the FACs. Through this reintegration process the identity boundaries that lie between the returnees and the community will be crossed, which not only leads to reintegration, but also to reconciliation between the people.

1.3.1   Counselling and Sensitisation at the Reception Centres

When an abductee has escaped, or has been released or rescued, then many of the abductees first go to a reintegration centre, also known as reception centres. Eleven of my informants escaped from the LRA, went to the UPDF barracks and were brought to either World Vision rehabilitation centre or Gulu Support the Children Organisation (GUSCO). These are biggest reception centres in northern Uganda located in Gulu town. In these centres amongst others medical treatment, vocational skills training and counselling is given where the returnee learns to cope with the violence it has survived, witnessed or committed and preparation for return to families[20]. The goals of these centres are to explain the FAC that it was not their fault that they were abducted and subsequently forced to carry out such atrocities and secondly, to teach the FAC how to behave and act in the community again (Akello, Richters & Reis 2006: 232). To reintegrate the returnees with their families, these centres reunify the returnees with the families at the centre. First the family members need to be located and then meetings between the family and the FAC will be

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[20] Interview with Lydia, social worker, Gulu Support the Children Organisation, Gulu, 16 March 2011

organised to reunify them. When the FAC leaves from the reintegration centre into the community, it receives soap, a mattress, a blanket and a basin.[21]

Reception centres do not only prepare the returnees on the reintegration in the community, reception centres (and also other NGO's) prepare the communities and the families on the return of the abductees through sensitisation campaigns and workshops, as is illustrated by the following quote from a cultural leader:

"[Stigmatization] was a big problem [in our community]. When the NGO's saw that stigmatisation became a big problem here, they started sensitizing and training the chiefs. After the chiefs they taught the cultural leaders."[22]

The message that was given to the community and the families was that any perpetration of violence was forced upon them and therefore not their choice. According to Annan, Brier and Aryemo (2009: 643) this community sensitisation elicits innocence discourse in the area, which helps the reintegration process of the FAC.

1.3.2   Welcoming Home ritual: Stepping on the Egg

After a period of counselling and vocational skills training at a reintegration centre, or after escaping from the LRA and going immediately home, my informants underwent several welcoming home and cleansing rituals. All my respondents mentioned to have undergone the 'Stepping on the Egg' ritual ('Nyono Tong Gweno') when they came home. This ritual takes place to welcome home a member of the family that has been away for an extended period. The reason for staying away from home may vary, however, there is a need to receive a person back home with this ritual to "reconcile any problems or feelings of alienation that may have resulted from their extended absence, and to ensure that the person feels once again a full member of the family" as Baines states (2005: 26). This ritual facilitates the reintegration of the returnee. The egg lies on a branch 'opobo' and a stick 'layebi' which are traditionally used to open granaries. The egg ('tong gweno') symbolizes

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[21] Interview with Alal Single Dora, project coordinator Psychosocial Support for Northern Uganda region, World Vision "Uganda Children of War Rehabilitation Centre", Gulu, 19 May

[22] Interview with Savero, cultural leader, Gwengdiya, 16 May 2011

purity and also 'soft', 'fragile' and is a restoration of innocence. The branch helps to cleanse the returnee form external influences which the returnee might have faced in the bush. The stick is a symbol of welcoming the returnee back home and shows that the family can share food together again with the ritual (Baines 2005: 26). The following quotes illustrate the ritual and that the returnees felt welcome after completing the ritual.

"I went and came home, so it was like I brought a message from the death when I came, when people saw me I was in very thorn clothes, very ugly clothes, everybody at home started crying of me. (…) Then they brought an egg and a branch of tree, which we respect. Then I stepped on it at the centre of the compound, then I came home and I entered inside."[23]

"Culturally when you stayed somewhere for long, you have to do some traditional cleansing. So for me when I came back for me I stepped on the egg for the cleansing process, to welcome me back home."[24]

"When I was coming on the compound, they gave me an egg to step on. You step on an egg, because people say that an egg is innocent, so if you step on an egg, means that you are also innocent."[25]

After performing this ritual, the returnee is innocent and ready to enter the home again, which restores the relation between the FAC and its family again. The fact of being innocent again, changes the returnee from a dirty, scary soldier into an innocent, forced abducted person, who is part of the family again. The identity boundary from soldier to family member is being crossed.

1.3.3   Cleansing Ceremonies: Slaughtering of a Goat, 'Washing of tears' Ceremony and the Ajwaka (Witch Doctor)

The cleansing ceremony that was most commonly performed among my respondents was the ceremony to cleanse the body from bad spirits '*cen*' by slaughtering a goat

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[23] Interview with Oryema, FAP, Gwengdiya, 12 April 2011

[24] Interview with Adoch, FAP, Gwengdiya, 3 March 2011

[25] Interview with Ojara, FAP, Gwengdiya, 16 March 2011

('Yubu Kum'). In the interviews I found out that different variations exist in this cleansing ceremony. The ceremony of slaughtering a goat is most commonly done in combination by letting the returnee walk over the blood of the slaughtered goat:

"When they slaughter the goat, the poor the blood down, then you have to walk over the blood which means that all the dirty things you were been doing in the bush, will be washed by the blood of the goat."[26]

The following quote is a variation to slaughtering the goat and walking over the blood:

"I have stayed in the bush for years, so maybe I have passed through bad things from the bush, so that is why they have to do traditionally cleanse me. They slaughtered a goat told me to step on the blood of the goat. When they ate the meat of the goat, they washed the hands with the water and the poured the water over me to cleanse me."[27]

"They slaughtered a goat, they took the food out from the womb and put it on my feet, on my fingers and on my head. Then when they finished, they cooked the meat of the goat. The water which they used to wash their hands, was poured [at the entrance of the hut while] I went inside the water. The water was leaking on me which meant that I was being washed."[28]

This cleansing ceremony can also be done for several people at the same time. One of my interviewees explained that it was done for her, her sister, brother and nephew. The ceremony is executed similarly to the quote above.

The *washing of tears ceremony* ('Lwoko Pig Wang') is done when a person, in this case the returnee, has been cried for because he or she disappeared and was thought to have died, but returned to the family. The name of this ceremony means literally to wash away the tears that the family has shed for the person who has died. Symbolically, it means that it is to wash away 'the thought of death' which could bring bad spirits to the family when the returnee comes back to the family (Baines

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[26] Interview with Oyet, FAP, Gwengdiya, 9 March 2011

[27] Interview with Adong, FAP, Gwengdiya, 16 March 2011

[28] Interview with Ojok, FAP, Gwengdiya, 12 April 2011

2005: 28). This is illustrated by a quote from the local counsel Opiro who executes the anti-crying ceremony:

"The [ceremony takes place] because if the [slaughtering of a goat] is not done, the returnee [who is cried for] comes back will not [live] for long, he will die. [He will die because] if he has killed [in the bush] he has the bad spirit of the disease.[29] The person who has cried for has may be killed, or walked over dead body, so the ritual should be done well to remove the bad spirit of the dead one, so that he is safe."[30]

Alanyo is a FAC who returned home after five years in the bush, she was cried for:

"Some people, who escaped earlier than me, brought the report home that I was killed from the bush, so people already cried for me. So when I came [home] they had to do the traditional cleansing. They welcomed me very well home: then they slaughtered a goat for the cleansing."[31]

Two of my informants went to a witchdoctor, an *ajwaka*, when they came back home. Going to a witch doctor is done when the returnee has abnormal behaviour according to the family, even when all the other cleansing rituals have been performed. The witch doctor slaughters a goat or chicken and throws it to the place where the witch doctor thinks the bad spirit is that causes the harm. A female returnee, Ajok, who was in captivity with the LRA for two months, went to a witch doctor due to her behaviour at home:

"[The witch doctor] gave me herbs, because I was having mental problems. I kept quiet, I did not talk to people, and sometimes I ran away from home and stayed in the bush."[32]

Adoch is another returnee who was brought to the witch doctor for another reason:
"They took me to a witch doctor to verify if I had not killed anyone from the bush."[33]

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[29] The disease refers to 'death' in this situation

[30] Interview with Opiro, local counsel, Gwengdiya, 11 May 2011

[31] Interview with Alanyo, FAP, Gwengdiya, 3 March 2011

[32] Interview with Ajok, FAP, Gwengdiya, 8 April 2011

[33] Interview with Adoch, FAP, Gwengdiya, 3 March 2011

These cleansing ceremonies of slaughtering a goat, visiting a witch doctor and washing away the tears, are all focusing on chasing away the bad spirits '*cen*'. Through these ceremonies, and through the ritual stepping on the egg, the returnee is innocent, cleansed and released from *cen*. This makes the returnee no longer a polluted person, a person who is dirty from the bush, but it makes a returnee clean and free and someone who becomes an accepted and reintegrated member of the family.

1.3.4   Intervention by Community members

There are no specific rituals for returnees to reintegrate into the community. All the rituals and ceremonies that were mentioned by the returnees were focussing on welcoming and cleansing the returnee done within the family. However, there are also mechanisms used for reintegrating and reconciling the returnees in the community, other than rituals. These reintegration mechanisms are interventions by elders who organise group meetings for the returnee, its family and the community members. And secondly some returnees told me in the interviews that they were advised by their friends on how they had to behave and stay in the community.

The meetings organised by the elders are aimed at sensitising the community in order for the returnees to reintegrate with the community and that reconciliation occurs between the community members and the returnee. The sensitisation by the elders is comparable to the sensitisation that was mentioned earlier by the reception centres and the NGO's: the returnees were abducted and forced to commit atrocities. This is illustrated by the following quote of a returnee who explains a sensitisation meeting led by a local chief:

"We had a very tough local chief, so when I came back I called for a meeting. Then [the local chief] told the community members that this war has affected every family, so there should not be any family being looked at negatively by any community member. Everyone should stay equally because each and every family, either if not affected, will be affected by this war. So through [this meeting] community members listened and did not look at our family differently than their family."[34]

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[34] Interview with Ochaka, FAP, Gwengdiya, 14 April 2011

Besides sensitisation meetings in the community in order to elicit reconciliation and reintegration between FACs and the community members, other meetings are organised where the returnee is reintegrated in its community. Even though it was only mentioned by a few of my informants, it shows how individual people in the community use mechanisms to reintegrate the returnee in the community. In the following example of my informant reconciliation occurs due to fact that forgiveness is given by the community to the returnee for the things he had done while being in the LRA:

"The community forgave me, [through] a meeting [that was] led by my father [who] is a cultural leader here. We sat under the trees; they slaughtered a goat and chicken, cooked beans and brought alcohol. [This was all done] to reunite us. People ate and were happy."[35]

According to a cultural leader, stigmatisation is currently not a problem in his community, it was present when the returnees were coming back from the bush, but the cultural leader mentions that: stigmatisation decreases over time. This will be analysed more in-depth in chapter two. To prevent any stigmatisation in the future, however, sensitisation is still done by this cultural leader. "In every community meeting; sensitisation is done by me".[36] Besides the sensitisation and group meetings that are led by cultural leaders in order to gain reintegration among the returnees, friends of returnees also play a role in this reintegration process. My informants explained that when they had come back from the bush, they were advised by friends how to stay with the community (at that time in the IDP camp).[37]

1.4 Conclusion

This chapter explored the mechanisms through which my informants reconstruct the identity boundaries that lie between FACs, when they return to their home of origin, and the community members. For both the construction and the deconstruction of these identities, the person is related to a particular surrounding, also known as the "community of practice".

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[35] Interview with Odoch, FAP, Gwengdiya, 4 May 2011

[36] Interview with Savero, cultural leader, Gwengdiya, 16 May 2011

[37] Interview with Trinity, FAP, Gwengdiya, 24 February 2011

From the results of the interviews, we have seen in this chapter that identities of my respondents can turn into cruel soldiers. In my opinion, in this phase labels and prejudices are formed by civilians about abductees. The perception of "we" as soldiers versus "them" as civilians creates an identity boundary which emerges into stigma when the abductee returns home. Returnees are hereby visualised as immoral and dangerous people. In this chapter we have seen the reconstruction of this identity again through the non-traditional and traditional mechanisms, sensitisation campaigns and counselling. We have seen that the role of the community members (i.e. family, elders, leaders, friends) is of crucial importance in facilitating the reintegration of the FACs, contributing to a restoration of the relations and thereby (partly) illuminating labels and prejudices.

Chapter one is the groundwork for chapter two. Current chapter focused on the first phase of the reintegration process, namely reconstruction of the identities through the cultural mechanisms. And since reintegration is a process and not a static concept accomplished through the non-traditional and traditional mechanisms, it takes time before the returnee is reintegrated by community and family members. Therefore, chapter two will continue from the end of chapter one, meaning the beginning of the returnee's life in the home and community of origin. Furthermore, it will focus on the relations between returnees and the family and community members. Questions that will be addressed are: "are returnees accepted and supported by family and community members on the long-term?", "Is stigma experienced", "and if it does, which forms exist"?

Chapter two
Forms of Stigma experienced by FACs

"Some people are saying: "this girl she came back from the bush, maybe she has bad spirits in her". Some people were saying: "you came back home, you are welcome [and] you [will] stay with us, it was not your intention to go to the bush". So some were advising me and others were stigmatizing me. Some people were blaming me that I might have come with bad spirits from the bush; the spirit of killing".[38]

2.1 Introduction

As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, stigma in relation to psychosocial adjustment is a concept that is not often studied. Betancourt and colleagues (2010*a*: 18) have done the first study looking at the role stigma as a post conflict factor related to psychosocial adjustment of FACs. Since the war came to a ceasefire in 2006 and Joseph Kony and his army withdrew from northern Uganda into the bushes of Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic and Darfur,[39] it is now five years after the ceasefire and in most cases for my respondents approximately ten years after their period in captivity in the LRA, it is good to study if the post conflict factor stigma is experienced by the FACs.

In this chapter the concept stigma will be operationalised and defined. Stigma consists of four components, namely discrimination, negative stereotyping, devaluation and social exclusion. Each component will be analysed in-depth from the perspective of my respondents. This will give insight in the current state of reintegration of the respondents and will contribute knowledge about the post-conflict factor *stigma*. Questions that will tend to be answered in this chapter are: Do the respondents currently experience stigma in their lives? Which forms do they experience? Who is being stigmatised and who is the stigmatizer?

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[38] Interview with Adoch, FAC, Gwengdiya, 3 March 2011

[39] Interview with Ojok, FAC, Gwengdiya, 12 April 2011

2.2 Defining Stigma

In order to understand the concept of stigma, it needs to be clarified and operationalised by a definition. In my conceptualisation, stigma is the result of a process in which a series of four interrelated components combine to generate stigma. These four components are: discrimination, negative stereotyping, devaluation and social exclusion (Link & Phelan 2001: 367; 2006: 528).

    Stigma is a process of devaluation leading to social exclusion, experienced by individuals and/or groups. Stigmatised individuals or groups are discriminated against by their neighbours through negative stereotypes and an attitude of prejudice (agreeing with the negative stereotype) within society as a whole. In other words, individual discrimination is experienced by virtue of his/her perceived membership in a stigmatised category (e.g. someone with AIDS; formerly abducted child; homosexual; etc.). By this conceptual definition, we see that 'stigma' has both a social and an attitudinal outcome: one, social exclusion and two, attitude of disrespect by members of society at large (this attitude being reinforced by stereotype and by prejudice). See figure 1 for a flow chart of stigma. [40]

Stigma →	Discrimination →	Social Exclusion
	Consisting of 'stereotype' and 'prejudice'	Through general **attitude of disrespect**
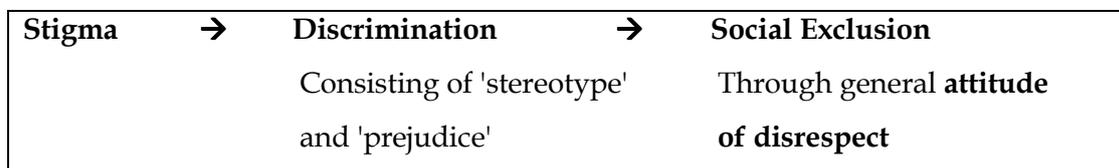
Figure 1: flow chart Stigma

This definition of stigma consists of: one, a *process*: process of devaluation; two, an *outcome*, social exclusion through general attitude of disrespect, which sets it apart from other types of discrimination, and three, an identification of the *constituent parts* of the concept, namely, discrimination, negative stereotypes (through negative labelling), prejudice, and the outcome (social exclusion through general attitude of disrespect).[41]

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[40] For more information on the components of stigma, see: Link, Bruce and Phelan, Jo (2006). Stigma and its public health implications. *Lancet* 367: 528-529. Link, Bruce and Phelan, Jo (2001). Conceptualizing stigma. *Annual Review of Sociology* 27: 363-385.

[41] I wish to acknowledge and thank my academic supervisor, Dr Mario Fumerton, for inspiring me with this conceptual and analytical definition of stigma

In order to investigate the meaning of social exclusion within the Acholi culture, research also needs to focus on the meaning of "social inclusion": how is one defined as a "member of society"? (e.g. through mutual obligations and reciprocal assistance from neighbours, marriage, inheritance, etcetera). Through the definition of social inclusion, a comparative point of reference is set up against which can be investigated how the respondents are discriminated by acts and attitudes that prevent them from receiving "membership in society".

2.3 Forms of Stigma in the Acholi context

In order to examine stigma in the Acholi culture, the forms of stigma that exist in the Acholi culture will be determined. The next step will be to analyse the concepts of the definition of stigma (discrimination, negative stereotypes, social exclusion and devaluation) experienced by FACs in the next paragraph.

Focus group discussions have been organised with three different Acholi groups: namely the male FACs, the female FACs and the elderly. These groups have amongst others discussed the different forms of stigma that exist in their culture. Analysing the data from these discussions, from the interviews with the FAC and with Non-Governmental Organisations such as World Vision and GUSCO, it can be stated that people from the Acholi culture, do not or hardly stigmatise openly and directly at the person itself. There are two forms of indirect stigmatisation, firstly talking about the person who is stigmatised without him or her knowing; I call this 'gossiping'. The second indirect form is 'social exclusion'; not involving a person in a particular group activity. Examples of the indirect stigmatisation by participants in focus group discussions:

"In our culture, during and after the war, when one came from the bush, and people talk about him to others that "he was the one who killed my brother, he was the one who abducted my father, he was the one who killed the mother, so then definitely that is stigmatizing him".[42]

"In our culture if a man brings a girl home, then the girl should be there two months, then the girl should conceal. If she doesn't conceal, then people would say that she is a barren, so they would start stigmatizing her. So that stigmatization they do it in a tricky way: if they see a

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[42] Patrick in male FAC focus group discussion, Gwengdiya, 21 May 2011

hen walking on the compound, they talk to the hen (…) [in a] human way "you, you don't want to lay your egg". So not directly, but she has to sense it".[43]

"In the community they could gossip about you, about someone, talk about someone to someone who is connected to someone".[44]

Alal, from World Vision Rehabilitation Centre states about indirect stigmatisation:

"In our culture people cannot just reject openly and say "pack and go and leave". But the kind of gesture that you know, if no one seeks and nobody is attending to you, when you need help and you are admitted to the hospital and nobody comes by your side. (…) it is more of silent, it doesn't come out right, because our culture does not allow that, so if it comes out that you chase away your son, the people would gather and they would stop you. They do it on the silent basis. It is like not giving attention".[45]

Another example of exclusion:

"(…) you can be stigmatized when people may fear you and they may not want to tell you if (…) anything is happening somewhere good. They may not inform you, because they may think that if you go there, you may disorganize the well-being of the people. So they stigmatize you in the other way, by not telling you that thing where you should go where people are".[46]

From analysing the data of the interviews and by looking at the examples of the interviews, stigma is in the Acholi culture indirectly performed. Gossiping and social exclusion are examples from indirect stigmatisations of FACs by community members. People that are stigmatised in the community are, according to the people in the three focus group discussions, people who are i.e. HIV/AIDS positive, very rich people, very poor people, formerly abducted people, paedophiles and witches.

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[43] Adong in female FAC focus group discussion, Gwengdiya, 23 May 2011

[44] Beatrice in female FAC focus group discussion, Gwengdiya, 23 May 2011

[45] Interview with Alal Single Dora, project coordinator Psychosocial Support for Northern Uganda region, World Vision "Uganda Children of War Rehabilitation Centre", Gulu, 19 May

[46] Ochaka in male FAC focus group discussion, Gwengdiya, 21 May 2011

2.4 Stigmatisation Experienced by FACs

As mentioned above, the different forms of stigma that are experienced by the FAC are mainly indirect: 'gossiping' and 'social exclusion'. The next step after determining the general forms of stigma practiced in the Acholi culture is to analyse whether stigma is experienced by FACs and what forms of stigma are experienced by FACs. Taking the definition from stigma, we can speak of stigmatisation when the four components (discrimination, negative stereotypes, social exclusion and devaluation) are identified in the context of the FACs. The forms of stigma that are experienced by FACs will then be compared to the general forms of stigma that exist in the Acholi culture and question such as "will the forms be the same or do they differ", "which forms are present?" will tend to be answered.

2.4.1   Discrimination

From the analysis it seems to be that there is a difference in the experiences of discrimination by the FAC in the period when the FAC just returned from the bush and came back home (either to the Internally Displaced Persons-IDP camp or to their original homes) compared to the experience of discrimination today; approximately ten years after their return. This is due the ´time factor´ in the reintegration process, which was already mentioned in the conclusion of chapter one. Two examples of male FACs who describe the difference in experiencing discrimination between when they had just arrived in the community and living in the community now for some years:

"When I came back from the bush, it was not easy for me to reunite with the community as before the abduction, so it took me time to reunite with the community. The community was not close to us because they thought that we have bad spirits from the bush, but when I stayed with them for some time, they gained back their trust which we were staying together with them."[47]

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[47] Interview with Odoch, FAC, Gwengdiya, 4 May 2011

"The community members saw how I was staying with them; I was not quarrelling with them, I was not putting much interest in what they were saying, I was good to them. Then they realized it was not good to talk bad about me, so then they left it."[48]

Alal from the rehabilitation centre World Vision emphasizes this shift as well:

"Stigmatisation is becoming less of an issue, [because] eventually at least every family has somebody close to them being abducted, eventually come to subsiding, but it is still there. But I do not think that it will go out, many of the children I have talked to feel that they have been labelled."[49]

Other reasons for the decrease in discrimination, is that some NGO's, local chiefs and local counsels have given sensitisation workshops and trainings in the different communities in northern Uganda to prevent stigmatisation and discrimination. These sensitisation programmes were focusing on the fact that the returnees had been in the bush, because they were abducted and were forced to go to the bush. Their participation was not voluntarily.[50] Furthermore, with the establishment of official laws prohibiting any forms of stigmatisation, have also contributed to the decrease in discrimination. Imprisonment or a monetary penalty will be given to the person who commits the stigmatisation.[51] When the FAC had just returned from the bush, they were often experiencing discriminative acts:

"What I was feeling when community members were ignoring me, was that life was not easy for me and always I used to think of these people who now dislike me, it is better for me to go back to the bush. But when I thought a lot of that, I left it."[52]

"When I went back to school, some people were talking bad things about me. I did not feel good, that is why I could not even continue with my school."[53]

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[48] Interview with Ochaka, FAC, Gwengdiya, 14 April 2011

[49] Interview with Alal Single Dora, project coordinator Psychosocial Support for Northern Uganda region, World Vision, "Uganda Children of War Rehabilitation Centre", Gulu, 19 May 2011

[50] Interview with Opiro, Local Counsel Gwengdiya, 11 May 2011, interview with Savero, cultural leader, Gwengdiya, 13 may 2011, interview with Lydia, social worker at GUSCO, Gulu, 16 March 2011,

[51] Interview with Opiro, Local Counsel Gwengdiya, 11 May 2011

[52] Interview with Concy, FAC, Gwengdiya, 2 may 2011

"People from the community were saying that it would have been good if I died in the bush, and did not escape."[54]

"Some people had something against some people who came back from the bush, like me. For example if the community member borrowed some money from me and I asked him to give it back the next day, it could just [lead to a bad remark]: "you are from the bush, you are not important". So some people had a bad heart to some people who had come back from the bush. I don't reply [to it], because if I reply, then that would cause more problems, so I keep quiet and forgive them. Now I am staying well with them, we are staying like one person, I am used to them and they are used to me."[55]

Besides interviewing FAC who have returned from the bush about ten years ago, I have interviewed a male FAC who escaped from the LRA very recently. This respondent has been in the LRA for twelve years, he was abducted in northern Uganda when he was twelve years old and did not dare to escape earlier, because of fear that the LRA would go to his community and would kill his family and the community members as revenge for his escape. This respondent, who is now twenty five years old, has come back from Congo where the LRA is nowadays still active and still abducting children every day (Perez 2011: 16) and is since five months back with his family. Even though it is only one respondent, I find it important to incorporate his story in order to show how an FAC feels when he has just come back recently from the bush:

"I have not yet moved to the community, only if I come home, from home to here, I go back. I have not yet been to the community so I do not know how they will react. I am afraid, as I was a militant, I am afraid that the community members will hurt me. I don't know how long that will take, because I am not educated I do not work together with people, the war has destroyed my education, I do not do anything which unites me with people, so the only thing I do, is I stay home. There is nothing that will reunite me, I don't know how long that will take."[56]

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53 Interview with Otto, FAC, Gwengdiya, 9 March 2011

54 Interview with Ajok, FAC, Gwengdiya, 11 May 2011

55 Interview with Ojara, FAC, Gwengdiya, 16 March 2011

56 Interview with Ojok, FAC, Gwengdiya, 12 April 2011

This quote from Ojara shows that a recently returned FAC feels afraid and anxious of the reactions of the community members and therefore prefers to stay home to prevent any stigmatisation and or other unpleasant experiences. From this and the previous quotes, it seems that the beginning of living at home and in the community, stigmatisation and the fear for being stigmatised is present, but will become less over time when people have gotten to know the FACs. It is plausible that there is another reason for the decrease in discrimination. From the analysis the theme 'jealousy' is an often re-occurring issue that a large number of my respondents have brought up. Jealousy related to returnees has been and is in a few cases an issue that has made and still makes returnees feel discriminated. Jealousy has often occurred by families whose children were also abducted, but who have not (yet) returned from the bush:

"When I came back, the community members were not happy; they were not seeing me with good eyes. Because many people had been abducted, I was the first one to come back, so they were jealous that their children did not come back. So they were not happy. They used funny language, that for me I am lucky that I came back from the bush and that their children are not yet back."[57]

"Community members were saying they found my coming back not good, because their children were still in the bush and some died from the bush. So it would have been better if I would also have died from the bush."[58]

"I was abducted, so those families who are not friendly to me their children sometimes were abducted, either together with me or differently. But the children died from the bush. But for me I came back, now the parents of the children they are jealous of my coming back of the bush."[59]

A community member whose children have not come back from the bush, they have all died while being in captivity and also she states that she is jealous of the FAC who did come back, and therefore she discriminates them:

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[57] Interview with Ajok, FAC, Gwengdiya, 18 April 2011

[58] Interview with Oyella, FAC, Gwengdiya, 6 May 2011

[59] Interview with Okeny, FAC, Gwengdiya, 13 may 2011

"I don't want to see those who came back from the bush. I don't like them, because mine they did not come back. Even their families I do not want to cross it, you should ask them, I don't want to come there. I cannot stay with the people, I don't have my children, so I have to stay alone because I am not happy."[60]

Analysing the drawing by the respondents, I can see a pattern in the people who are jealous about the return of the FAC. Jealousy often seems to occur often by neighbours or community members who live close to the FAC. An explanation for this is that the jealous person is confronted with the fact that the respondent did return from the bush, but their child or children did not return. This everyday exposure of the truth, can lead to feelings of jealousy towards the returnees.

Continuing the analyses of the data, there is another form besides jealousy, of discrimination that comes forward from the drawings and interviews. In the first place, it seems to be that female FACs are mainly discriminated against by community members, and more specifically mainly by men. Female FACs were in the LRA often forced to be with a soldier or a commander. Sometimes young women found the security and the privileges of being a "wife" of a rebel commander good and comfortable.[61] However, "wives" of soldiers or commanders were also often mistreated by their "husbands". Beating and hard work were mistreatments that many girls and women had to face in the LRA. This is illustrated by the following quote:

My husband who was a lieutenant was not treating me well; sometimes he could beat me. Even up until now I feel the chest pain [because] of his beating. He beat me because you had to carry all the time a lot of luggage and in case you forgot or missed any items, which you were supposed to carry, he would beat you."[62]

Since the female FACs were often assigned to male FACs, girls came back often pregnant and/or with one or more children. Now, living in the community, female FACs tend to be victims of the discriminatory act of 'being refused by men'. This is shown by three quotes from different interviews with female FACs:

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[60] Interview with Mardilena, community member, Gwengdiya, 16 May 2011

[61] Interview with Alanyo, FAC, Gwengdiya, 3 March 2011

[62] Interview with Adong, FAC, Gwengdiya, 16 March

"Since I came back from the bush I cannot stay with a man, I tried to get a man, but that man was insulting me all the time with the fact that I am a returnee from the bush and might kill him. So now I am unlucky. Up until now I am staying with my parents."[63]

"My husband who I was with before they abducted me divorced me when I came back, because I was abducted and came back pregnant."[64]

"There is no man who looks after the children of another man. I have children from another man. No one can accept that, so I have to stay alone and take care of the children."[65]

Secondly, discrimination does not only affect the returnee, but it also extends to returnees' children. It seems to be that 'children from the bush', meaning children, who were born when their mothers were in captivity or born when the mothers had just come of the bush, are distinguished from other children:

"The community is talking a lot about my child who I came with from the bush. They also insult him."[66]

"[The family members] don't say anything about me, but sometimes they talk against my children, they say that these children they don't have their father and that is a very stupid way to give birth to children."[67]

After discussing the actual acts of discrimination, there seems to be a pattern of who discriminates the FACs. From nearly all the interviews it came forward that the FAC were welcomed home and not discriminated against:

"When I came back home, people at home they welcomed me, they were very happy with me. Even until now I am still staying with them, they are very happy."[68]

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[63] Interview with Alanyo, FAC, Gwengdiya, 3 March 2011

[64] Interview with Oyella, FAC, Gwengdiya, 3 March 2011

[65] Interview with Adoch, FAC, Gwengdiya, 6 March 2011

[66] Interview with Alanyo, FAC, Gwengdiya, 3 March 2011

[67] Interview with Concy, FAC, Gwengdiya, 18 April 2011

[68] Interview with Alanyo, FAC, Gwengdiya, 3 March 2011

"[My family] did not react negatively [when I came back pregnant], they only welcomed me. The only people who didn't react nice to me were people from the community."[69]

2.4.2 Negative Stereotyping and Labelling

In the previous paragraph of discrimination, the actual acts of discrimination are mentioned. In this paragraph I will analyse and explain the previous findings of discrimination through negative stereotypes and labels. From the previous paragraph it came forward that female FACs tend to be more discriminated when they come back from the bush. This discrimination can be clarified through two reasons: first, these formerly abducted girls are more often held to be sexually impure due to the sexual violations during captivity, and the girls are perceived to be more dangerous. The female returnees are considered as being morally compromised and therefore dangerous, making them not good marriage partners (Finnström 2008: 190-192). This is confirmed by Oyella who stayed in captivity for one year and who came back with two children:

"People were saying that if someone comes back from the bush might kill someone. [My husband] was afraid of his life, that his wife might kill him one time."[70]

Second, since these female FACs often come back either pregnant and/or with one or more children; Acholi men tend not to stay with these female FAC, because Acholi men generally do not want to "marry" women who have children from other men.[71] In this respect, formerly abducted girls are more stigmatized than formerly abducted boys in society (Finnström 2008: 193).

From the interviews with the FAC, it came forward that the children from female FAC were often victims of discriminative acts such as insulting. Children are negatively stereotyped and labelled as "children from the bush" by other community members. These children were born in the bush in the period when their mother was in captivity by the LRA. Insults that the children face when they live at their mother's

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[69] Interview with Adong, FAC, Gwengdiya, 18 march 2011

[70] Interview with Oyella, FAC, Gwengdiya, 6 May 2011

[71] I write "marry" between quotation marks, because the official marrying does rarely take place in northern Uganda because men have to pay the dowry, which is for most men too expensive. Acholi men choose a woman which they want to marry and because the dowry is unaffordable, the man and woman call each other "husband" and "wife".

home, is that they hear "that they should go to their own home", meaning to the home of their father. In many cases the father has died in the bush or lives with another wife and does not allow the child and its mother to come to live with him, i.e. due to tensions with the other wife who the father lives together with[72].

In the previous section I mentioned that FACs faced discrimination by community members when they had just escaped or were released from the LRA. Discrimination that the FAC generally faced, were based on two labels from community members: the first label is 'possessed by ghostly vengeance', or in Luo '*cen*' which means bad spirit[73]. The second label is 'killer'. What comes forward from the previous section is that these acts of discrimination are mainly present at the beginning of their return and fade away when the returnees spent some time within their community so that trust is regained. Giving the label '*cen*' to a returnee is a form of social rejection, it was particularly given to the returnees when they were making 'mistakes' or quarrelling in front of the community:

"Some people said that may be I escaped and I have hidden the gun somewhere, [so that] I could disturb them in the future. And I came with the gun but I handed the gun [over[to the government soldiers. And sometimes they said that I have bad spirits and can use the "panga" which is a knife for cutting. It is a big knife, like a sword, but even bigger than swords, I can even use them to kill people. That is how they insult me. And in case if like someone quarrels with me or I quarrel with some people, then other people will comment "don't quarrel with that woman who came from the bush, she still has bad spirits in her, she might kill you"."[74]

"When I came back after the war, people were saying: "she has bad spirits from the bush, may be she has even killed people from the bush". So those words, those insults were not good for me."[75]

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[72] Interview with Oyella, FAC, Gwengdiya, 6 May 2011

[73] Luo is the Acholi language spoken in northern Uganda

[74] Interview with Alanyo, FAC, Gwengdiya, 3 March 2011

[75] Interview with Adong, FAC, Gwengdiya, 4 May 2011

The second label that returnees often had to face was being called 'a killer'. Community members often feared the returnees, which led to feelings of shame for the returnee:

"As soon as a person talks about you when other people are there, then those people, who may know you not so well, will start to fear you. [That makes you] feel ashamed."[76]

"The community members were happy [when I came back], only the few who could not see me with good eyes. Like if for example we go for community digging and you are chatting with your colleagues, so if you are talking, some words may come "these people were staying in the bush with the LRA, they have the same character so they misbehave, they might kill us", so that is how they used to call me."[77]

2.4.3 Devaluation

In this component in the stigma process, the labelled person experiences status loss, or devaluation. When people are labelled and linked to undesirable characteristics, a rationale is constructed for devaluing and excluding them (see section 2.4.4 on inclusion and social exclusion). People that are stigmatised by being labelled; are set apart due to the negative stereotypes and linked to undesirable characteristics which lead to experiences of devaluation. When negative stereotyping and labelling is successful, it is an almost immediate consequence that the person who is being stereotyped, experiences a decrease in its status hierarchy. The person who is connected to the undesirable characteristics has a reduced status in the eyes of the stigmatizer (Link and Phelan, 2001: 371). What comes forward from the previous sections is that when a FAC has just returned, it is insulted from having bad spirits or from being a killer, which makes this group come forward as being worth less compared to the stigmatizer itself:

"Some people have something against some people who came back from the bush like me (…). [Community members] say: "you you are from the bush, you are not important", so some

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[76] Interview with Adoch, FAC, Gwengdiya, 3 March 2011

[77] Interview with Ochaka, FAC, Gwengdiya, 14 April 2011

people have a bad heart to some people who are back from the bush. We don't reply to it, because if we reply then that would cause more problems, so I keep quiet and forgive them."[78]

"People from the community were not nice to me, because they were saying that people who come back from the bush, they have bad spirits, <u>they don't have brains</u>, so for me if I hear things like that, I was not feeling happy with them. So that was not good."[79]

"They always used to say: "this guy he looks like someone who doesn't have brains because he stayed in the bush."[80]

In the previous section it came forward that formerly abducted girls are being labelled as being sexual impure and dangerous. Due to these labels female FACs often face difficulties finding a husband and that is why these FACs tend not to live independently but with their parents, which can lead to devaluation of the community:

"(…) I am now 37, I was supposed to have my family and my husband. So now I do not have [that], [which makes me] live like a child."

2.4.4 Social Exclusion

The last component is social exclusion, in the literature also called 'rejection'. In order to examine social exclusion for FACs and to explore if FACs are excluded from their communities or from community activities, it is necessary to study what *social inclusion* means in the Acholi culture. Three focus groups with male FACs, female FACs and elders from the community have been organised. In these focus groups we have discussed the matter of 'what is a community', 'what makes a person part of a community', 'what activities do you do together within the community'. Furthermore in the individual interviews with FACs, family and community members, I have asked questions about own experiences of social exclusion. First I

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[78] Interview with Ojara, FAC, Gwengdiya, 16 March 2011

[79] Interview with Ojara, FAC, Gwengdiya, 4 May 2011.

[80] Interview with Otto, FAC, Gwengdiya, 9 May 2011

will discuss the concept of being socially included in the Acholi community and then I will study the concept social exclusion experienced by my informants.

An Acholi community is a community where people live together who are from the same tribe, Acholi, but of different clans. In the community people work and live together in the same area. Also people know each other well and therefore people help each other. You are part of the community, when you are either born in the community or when you are introduced in the community by a member from that community. For instance, girls or women can become part of another community when they are brought in the community as a wife. And although men tend to stay in the community in which they are born, they can also move to another community in situations like family issues. The activities that community members do together in the community are firstly, community meetings. Topics are discussed related to community life, i.e. 'group savings' (for people who are sick, for burial ceremonies). Secondly, community work such as digging the land, cleaning the water source, cleaning the road and haunting. Thirdly, traditional activities are done within the community, traditions like cultural dances (i.e. when someone is possessed by '*cen*', or at funerals the courtship dances 'Orak', 'lakaraka') and rituals (i.e. *Mato Oput* for reconciliation through compensation and reunification between two clans). These activities are collectively done by community members who are socially included in their community. [81]

The counterpart of social inclusion is social exclusion. The questions that need to be answered are: Are FACs socially excluded from their community and from particular activities in the community? If yes, what are the actual experiences they have encountered or still encounter and can these be attributed to stigmatisation? In the social exclusion component there is also the role of the actor committing the social exclusion. How do these people who stigmatise, explain their discriminately and exclusivist treatment? Individual interviews with FAC and community members who play a role in the exclusion of the FAC have been done in order to answer these questions. From the interviews with the FACs it comes forward that the experiences of exclusion tend to be mainly experienced by formerly abducted girls:

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[81] Male, female and elders focus group discussion, Gwengdiya, 21-25 May 2011

"[The community members] stopped me from doing the community activity."[82]

"When they (…) came together to do the community work they didn't inform me. So when I went I wanted to join, they said that now the time is over, I should have to wait for another time. So when that one got finished, they didn't call me. So they are not willing to include me."[83]

When analysing the data it is remarkable that women are the ones experiencing exclusion and not male FAC, however it is also a logical and understandable outcome if we look at the group of people who were mainly targeted to be discriminated against, namely: female FAC.

The social exclusion that currently takes place is among returnees and between returnees and community members. This exclusion is based on greed. Greed created when the government or NGO's come to the community and give aid to particular people in the community. From the interviews feelings of greed occur and people tend not to inform returnees when aid (i.e. goats, food, etc) is brought to the community. This greed occurs between returnees, leading to one returnee excluding the other one to receive more himself:

"Sometimes returnees are excluded from activities for LRA victims. When assistance is given by NGO's or by the government who target war victims, you can find that some people are excluded. The ex-LRA excludes another ex-LRA. This is because some people want to get more assistance. [Some people] do not want others to get assistance so that they get more assistance on behalf of the others.

The other form of greed is between community members and returnees. Community members are afraid that returnees receive more aid then themselves and therefore exclude the returnees from particular projects:

"Sometimes when there is a productive meeting for the community here, people exclude me. They are jealous. They say that if I have this Amnesty certificate, may be in the future I will

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[82] Interview with Ajok, FAC, Gwengdiya, 11 May 2011

[83] Interview with Oyella, FAC, Gwengdiya, 6 May 2011

get some help, either from the government or an organization, so they have to burn the certificate."⁸⁴

To research the perspective of the people who stigmatise, there were two research implications: first, the interview with the social excluder had to be general, no names could be mentioned to prevent worsening of the relationship between the social excluder and the FAC. And secondly, I found out that community members do not speak openly about exclusionary behaviour (which was mentioned by a FAC). A reason for this could be the strong religious component in the lives of Acholi people. Citizens are mainly Catholics who live according to the morals and values of the religion, from which it is unjust to exclude a person.

Considering these facts, the collected data is relatively limited on this aspect. However, what mainly came forward from the interviews in which the respondent was open about its attitude and behaviour towards FACs, was that jealousy played a big role in the non-acceptance of the presence of the returnee. Jealousy, as mentioned earlier, of the fact that these FACs did come back and their children did not come back or have been reported dead. Due to the jealousy, people find the confrontation with returnees too difficult to interact with them:

"Before the war I was staying well with [other community members], but during the war they abducted my children. [The neighbours'] children came back, but my children did not come back. (…) I am not happy with them (…). If they would not [be here] like my children, that would be better. But since now they are back, at least one of the three of my children should have [come] back. But now all [my] three [children] did not come back and [that is why] I am staying alone, (…). I am not happy, so I have to stay alone. I don't want to see those who came back from the bush. I don't like them, because mine they did not come back."⁸⁵

A remarkable last finding on the component 'social exclusion' from the interviews is that some returnees tend to exclude themselves from community activities, in stead of community members excluding the returnees. Community members assign this to the fact that *"some returnees have difficulties in their brains from the bush and therefore*

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⁸⁴ Interview with Adong, FAC, Gwengdiya, 4 may 2011

⁸⁵ Interview with Mardilena, community member, Gwengdiya, 16 May 2011

decide not to be with the group, they find that it is not easy for them to stay with the group and [therefore] they do not join".

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter stigma has been extensively analysed in the Acholi culture and among returnees. From the analysis of the interviews, I observed all four components of stigma are being experienced nowadays among formerly abducted girls.

In this chapter analysing stigma, I came to several remarkable results. First, we have seen that discrimination of returnees reduces over time and is nearly not experienced by the returnees today. One group who is discriminated is the group of female FACs who face discrimination by being refused by men or by former husbands. Additionally, it came forward that children, who are born in the bush, also often face discrimination. Furthermore, jealousy by community members currently ventilates through discriminatory acts towards returnees. Jealousy among community members occurs when their abducted children did not come back from the bush. Seeing other returnees in the community makes them jealous and results in discriminatory acts.

Discrimination comes forward due to negative stereotyping and labelling. What we have learned in this chapter is that formerly abducted girls are perceived as being sexually impure and dangerous. The labels impurity and killers are attached to these women. Another negative stereotype that occurred when the returnees just came back from the bush is that they are perceived to be possessed by bad spirits. Through rituals these bad spirits can be taken away.

Devaluation, or status loss, is the third component. The label of being impure and a murderer makes the returnee, and in the situation of the female respondents, become worth less compared to the stigmatizer. Also, female FACs who are refused by men are therefore obliged to live with their parents due to economic reasons, this can lead to less social self esteem and devaluation.

Fourthly, social exclusion is also mainly experienced by formerly abducted girls. Women tend to be viewed as sexually impure and dangerous leading to being excluded by the community. Moreover, feelings of greed among returnees, and in this case not specifically women, lead to social exclusion. It occurs that returnees do not inform other returnees when aid is given by government or NGO's, with the idea

of receiving more themselves. As mentioned before, feelings of jealousy by community members towards returnees that their children did not return back from the bush, lead also to social exclusion.

Chapter three

Psychosocial Adjustment of returnees

"I am always having trouble in my heart, because I am always thinking of how can I catch up with my age-mates, how can I catch up with life in the community, who can help me so that I can do things which can push me to the next level from where I am. Always when I think of that, I really always have trouble in my heart."[86]

3.1 Introduction

As mentioned in the introduction, previous research on mental health and psychosocial adjustment has focused on the well-being of returnees right after their return and merely investigated the relation between mental health outcomes with past-war experiences (Allen & Schomerus 2006: 21; Bayer, Klasen & Adam 2007: 558; Derluyn et al. 2004: 861; Okello, Onen & Musisi 2007: 228). However, studies by Khort and colleagues (2008: 701) and Betancourt and colleagues (2010*a:* 19) both showed significant results that psychosocial adjustment was influenced by a post-conflict factors, the latter study is the only empirical study that found a subsequent association between the post-conflict factor stigma and psychosocial adjustment. Kohrt and colleagues only assumed the impact of stigma on the psychosocial adjustment.

Due to these two studies, one can see that research on the long-term affects on the psychosocial adjustment is relevant and necessary. This will be the main focus of this chapter: finding what the post-conflict factor(s) is/are on the psychosocial adjustment of returnees. This will be done through an examination of the psychological and social functioning of a returnee. More precisely, the psychosocial adjustment will be analyzed of returnees that have been living with their families and in their communities for approximately ten years. This chapter will start with an explanation of the term 'psychosocial adjustment'; which will be followed by a presentation of the results of the Northern Uganda Child Psychosocial Adjustment Scale (NUCPAS) questionnaire. In the last section of this chapter I will analyse the determinants of the psychosocial adjustment of the returnees in Gwengdiya. Only

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[86] Interview with Ojok, FAC, Gwengdiya, 12 April 2011

the determinants that came out of the semi-structured interviews and the questionnaire will be analysed here.

3.2 Psychosocial Adjustment of returnees

Before examining the psychosocial adjustment of the returnees, it is necessary to give clarification about this term, which is already shortly done in the introduction of this research. The definition that I will apply in current research is by Betancourt and colleagues: the term "psychosocial" refers to a dynamic relation between the psychological and social effects, each continually influencing the other. The "psychological effects" influence the emotion, behaviour, thoughts, memory, learning ability, perceptions and understanding. The "social effects" are the effects that refer to altered relationships due to death, separation, estrangement and other losses, family and community breakdown, damage to social values and customary practices, and the deconstruction of social facilities and services. These social effects are also elicited due to economic changes, for example that families and individuals become economical affected (i.e. becoming poor) through the material and economic devastation from an armed conflict (2008*a*: 14).

In order to investigate the *post-conflict factor(s)* affecting the psychosocial adjustment of the returnees, the 'Northern Uganda Child Psychosocial Adjustment Scale' (NUCPAS) will give us insight on the degree of four sub-scales, namely: 'Anxiety and Depression', 'Pro-social Behaviour', 'Hostility' and 'Confidence'. This chapter will continue with a section on the results of the questionnaire and will finalise with an identification of the determinants of the outcomes of the psychosocial adjustment.

On average the female returnees, who I interviewed, had a mean degree of anxiety and depression of 2,61 meaning that on average they experience 'sometimes' anxious and depressed feelings.[87] Compared to the male informants, *the female respondents are more anxious and depressed*. The male FACs have a mean degree of anxiety and depression that is 2,06 meaning that on average male returnees 'rarely' experience anxious and depressed feelings. This difference in average is significant: t

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[87] As mentioned in the methodology section, the question responses were scored on a 1-4 scale, ranging from "never= 1", "rarely = 2", "sometimes = 3' to "always = 4".

= -2,4; df = 21; p < 0,05 with an independent-samples t-test.[88] Gender can clarify 4,41 per cent of the average difference in the degree of anxiety and depression.

Comparing the degrees of pro-social behaviour of the female and male returnees, I can state that the mean differences between the two groups are not significant. Female FACs have a mean degree of 3,56, with a standard deviation of 0,32, meaning that on average pro-social behaviour is 'always' perceived. Male FACs have a mean degree of 3,54 with a standard deviation of 0,38, which are similar scores to the degree of pro-social behaviour of the girls. For the variables hostility and confidence also corresponding results are found. Hostility is both for female returnees (mean is 1,02 with standard deviation of ,07) and male returnees (mean is 1,06 with a standard deviation of ,16) on average 'never' experienced. The difference in means is not significant. For the variable confidence; a mean of 3,72 is found for female returnees and a mean score of 3,56 is found for male returnees, meaning that both groups of respondents are on average 'always' confident. The difference is also not significant between male and females. Appendix A gives an overview of the individual scores of the returnees on the different sub-scales in two tables: the psychosocial adjustment for female returnees and the psychosocial adjustment for male returnees.

3.3 Determinants of the psychosocial adjustment of returnees

From the above mentioned results there is one remarkable difference between female and male respondents. Female FACs experience more often feelings of anxiety and depression compared to male respondents. The other subscales of pro-social behaviour, hostility and confidence are similarly responded by female and male returnees who I interviewed. I cannot generalise these results due to the small sample size, however, about my respondents I can state that they tend to be confident in their everyday lives, perceive to have pro-social behaviour and tend not to be hostile. In this section I will explore the different determinants of the psychological adjustment of the returnees who I interviewed.

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[88] Independent-samples t-test is used when two samples are used to infer whether there is a difference between the means of two populations. For more information I refer Grimm, Laurence, G. (1993). *Statistical Application for the Behavioural Sciences.* Canada: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

3.3.1   Community stigma

Firstly, the determinant of the psychosocial adjustment of the female returnee needs clarification since this group has an outstanding result on the anxiety and depression sub-scale. Through the questionnaire and additional questions to clarify the replies, I found that the stigmatisation which female FACs suffered from in their community, is related to the anxiety and depressed feelings. This coincides with earlier findings from chapter two. Female returnees who I interviewed tend to be the people who suffer from stigmatisation in the community. They often returned home either pregnant, with a child, or both. The fact that men tend to refuse these women, means that these women have to take care of the children alone without support from a husband. In the cases of my female interviewees, the ones who were stigmatised and refused by men were accepted by their families where they were either living or were neighbours from. The following quotes illustrate the depressed feelings of female FACs who are in this situation:

"Sometimes I think a lot about the past, [and then] I reflect that if I would not be abducted, by now I would be together with my husband. This is not making me feel happy."[89]

"I am always thinking that if I was not abducted, I would have been at my home with my husband, I missed that. Always I have trouble in my heart, because I don't have the father of my children. (…) I feel unloved, because I have the children at home and in our family there is no girl who has her children home like me. (…) The children should always be together with their father."[90]

"After the war when I came back, up until now, I am not happy because I missed the opportunity to have my husband, now I am struggling to look after my children. The abduction has wasted my time to do things that could help me. Generally up until now I am not happy. Before the abduction, I had not much problem, but now if I think of my life before the abduction and I compare it to the life after the abduction, sometimes I cry, sometimes I feel really unhappy. (…) Before the abduction no one was stigmatizing me, but after the

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[89] Interview with Adoch, FAP, Gwengdiya, 3 March 2011

[90] Interview with Adong, FAP, Gwengdiya, 18 April 2011

abduction people stigmatized me, my husband refused me with the children I have with him."[91]

In the previous examples of the female FAC, it comes clearly forward that these women are unhappy to live without a husband and to take care of the children alone. In order to explain the role of stigma in the psychosocial adjustment outcome, I will use the social stress theory from Aneshensel (1992: 26-28). This theory demonstrates that *stress* from a particular social status has a causal relation with psychosocial adjustment outcomes (see figure 2). As we have seen from chapter two, stigma is a concept consisting of devaluation (or status loss), discrimination through prejudices, and social exclusion. And as shown before, my female respondents who came back with children from the bush partly experienced social exclusion which can be related to a process of devaluation by former husbands or other men due to being perceived as sexually impure and/or dangerous. When looking at this theory, stigma is related to stress through a process of devaluation and according to the social stress theory, stress has a negative impact on the psychosocial adjustment of the FACs (Aneshensel 1992: 26-28).

According to Aneshensel and Phelan protective factors can serve as a buffer for the risk of becoming psychosocially maladjusted. Protective factors can be internal and external resources (Aneshensel & Phelan 1999 in Betancourt et al. 2010*a*: 19). External resources refer to the emotional and perceived social support and/or acceptance by for example families and community members. Internal resources refer to the coping mechanisms of FACs who need to cope in this situation with the stigma which is the stressor. Stigma therefore, is not only increasing stress within the individual, but may also reduce a person's access to coping measures (Aneshensel 1992: 25). According to Aneshensel's coping mechanisms, behaviour differs among people since it depends on pre-existing assets such as self-esteem. These assets are called upon when stress arises (1992: 18). Protective and resilience factors will be examined in more detail at the end of this chapter.

From the results of the questionnaire, the most outstanding result is the difference between male and female FACs on the sub-scale anxiety and depression. This can be ascribed to stigma as mentioned before. Even though the other results on

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[91] Interview with Oyella, FAP, Gwengdiya, 6 may 2011

the sub-scales were not deviant compared to non- abducted people, from the follow up questions to the NUCPAS, several themes have come up for female as well as for male returnees. These themes are linked to feelings of depression and unhappy feelings for the returnees when talking to the respondent. But the issues seem not to hamper the psychosocial adjustment significantly, since it is not visible in the results. Since particular themes were repeated by the different returnees, I find it important to mention them in the following section since they apparently play a role in the lives of the returnees, even though they are not significantly influencing the psychosocial adjustment of the returnees.
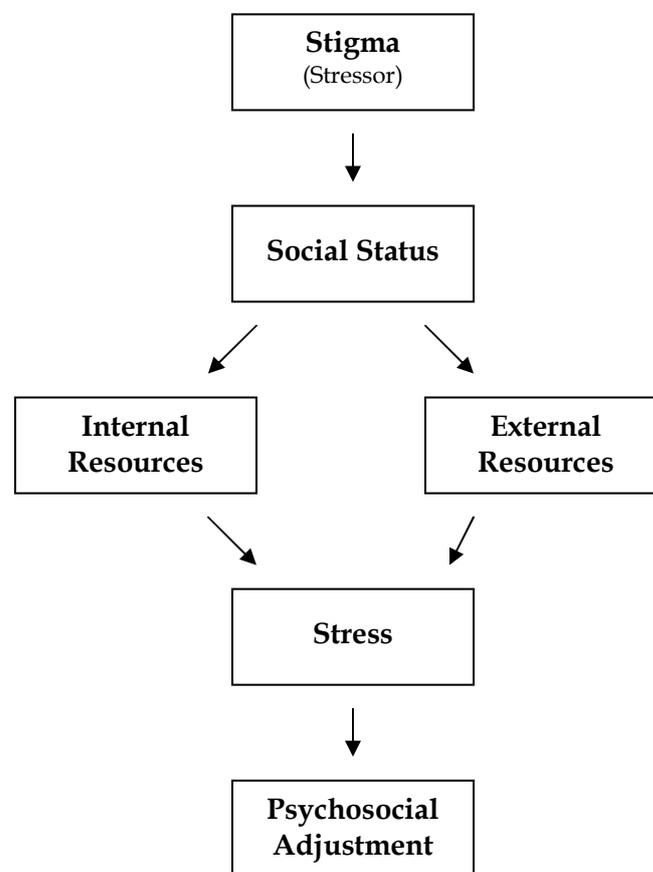

Figure 2: Adapted social stress theory to the situation of formerly abducted children

3.3.2   Lack of education

From the questionnaire and my follow-up questions that were semi-structured, not only came forward that these female returnees were experiencing feelings of depression due to the fact that they were refused by either their husbands or other

men. The female informants also brought forward that they were unhappy that they missed education due to their abduction. Most of my informants, both male and female, only went to school until primary level three or four and were forced to stop because of the abduction. From the interviews it comes forward that returnees face economic challenges due to the lack of education:

"The trouble I have in my heart is that some of my age-mates, who were not abducted, are now living in a farer situation than me. I did not go to school, I have no job, I was three years in the bush which ruined my future, compared to the others. I can only do farming and from farming you cannot earn a living which my friends are having."[92]

"Sometimes I have trouble in my heart because if I would not have been abducted I [would have] studied, then by now I would have a good job. Now I am struggling to survive."[93]

"I missed education because of the abduction. I also missed the opportunity for the business, because in the year when I was abducted, I could have sold my chickens and I had 30 goats, so I missed the opportunity for the business."[94]

Most of my respondents were between the age of eleven and fourteen when they were abducted. This is the age that children are supposed to go to school. Also, most of my respondents stayed between one and five years with the LRA. And according to Annan, Blattman and Horton the longer the children spent in captivity of the LRA than in school or acquiring employment experience, the larger the gap in education outcomes becomes, when the group is compared to non-abducted children. And for those who were abducted at younger ages, were all together less likely to return to school after the abduction (2006: 30). These findings correspond with my own findings. Only two of my informants went back to school after the abduction, all the others became farmers, with the exception of one who set up a business.

The lack of education not only leads to unhappy feelings among my respondents for their current situation, it also seems to influence the future's prospect of my informants:

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[92] Interview with Ocaya, FAP, Gwengdiya, 25 February 2011

[93] Interview with Ayo, FAP, Gwengdiya, 18 April 2011

[94] Interview with Odoch, FAP, Gwengdiya, 4 May 2011

"I think my future will be bad, because the time which I was supposed to do good things to improve my life has been ruined. If I would [have been] home, may be I could have been educated and [gotten] a job later."[95]

"Before my abduction, I was staying well with people, I was going to school, I was hoping to help many people in the future. But now after the war I cannot help, because I don't have any knowledge in me, I didn't go to school. And I have bullet shots everywhere [in my body] and now I am weak."[96]

3.3.3   Physical injuries

From the previous quote, my informant Ojok who has recently returned from the bush after staying there for twelve years, he mentions besides the lack of education, that he suffers from his injuries because they make him physically weak. In interviews with other respondents the negative impact of physical injuries also came forward. Even though for some returnees it is approximately ten years since they are back from the bush, they are still suffering from physical injuries. The injuries seem to prohibit them from working efficiently and the fact that their friends who were not abducted do not have these pains, make them unhappy. The following quotes from my respondents explain the relation between injuries and unhappy feelings, the relation with lack of work efficiency and the relation with the comparison to age-mates this:

"I don't cry, but I have pain in my chest. I have restless nights, because during the day I have chest pain. Before I was abducted I was healthy, but [when] I came back I had problems with my chest. That [does] not make me happy [and] gives me trouble."[97]

"The challenge that I have, is when there is a clan problem. When the clan members need a contribution, they also need me to contribute financially. This one is a challenge for me, because I am disabled, [I have a wound in my foot from a bullet]. [When you] compare my efforts with theirs; mine is less. So that is the challenge I am [facing]."[98]

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[95] Interview with Ochaka, FAP, Gwengdiya, 14 April 2011

[96] Interview with Ojok, FAP, Gwengdiya, 6 May 2011

[97] Interview with Opiro, FAP, Gwengdiya, 25 February 2011

[98] Interview with Ocora, FAP, Gwengdiya, 12 April 2011

"Sometimes I have troubles in my heart, because I have typhoid and sometimes my chest [hurts]. This makes me think a lot, because always if I get pain in any part of my body, I feel really unhappy because I know [that] I have pain in my body and my friends are not having it. And I don't have money and my friends do have money, I feel really unhappy because they are staying better than me. If I start having the chest pain, I start feeling unhappy because of the pain. I have typhoid, and with the load I carried I have the chest pain which doesn't make me happy."[99]

3.3.4   Protective factors of the psychosocial adjustment

From the results of the questionnaire came that female returnees tend to be on average sometimes depressed or anxious and the male returnees rarely. On the other three sub-scales scores are found that all the returnees seem to be on average confident, pro-social and do not experience hostile feelings. Since there is a difference in outcome between the subscale anxiety and depression, and the other three subscales, it is necessary to examine this difference. In order to analyse this, I will look at role of the protective and resilience factors that are present in the post-conflict lives of my informants.

Acceptance and support from the family factors are according to Betancourt and colleagues among the most potent protective factors in the psychosocial adjustment for returnees (2008*b*: 24-25).[100] Quantitative (Boothby, Crawford and Halperin 2006: 104) and qualitative (Annan, Blattman and Horton 2006: 66) research provides evidence of the integral role of the family in the reintegration of returnees and their long-term mental health outcomes. From these researches comes that most families accept the returnees and provide them with support and care. Annan, Blattman and Horton found in their research that family acceptance was remarkably high; ninety-four per cent of their respondents felt accepted by their family and only one per cent felt unhappy and unwelcome upon their return (2006: 66).

Analysing the results of the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews, there are several protective factors that could explain the positive results of the three subscales. Firstly, family acceptance can be seen as a protective factor for my

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[99] Interview with Adong, FAP, Gwengdiya, 16 March 2011

[100] Unpublished report. Betancourt, Theresa, Borisova, Ivelina, Rubin-Smith, Julia, Gingerich, Tara, Williams, Timothy, and Agnew-Blais, Jessica (2008). *Psychological Adjustment and Social Reintegration of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups: the State of the Field and Future Directions.* A Report Prepared for Psychology Beyond Borders.

respondents. In the semi-structured interview, I have asked all my respondents the question if they were welcomed by their family when they returned from the bush. This was followed by structured questions that focused on the long term reintegration into their families, i.e. How do you feel in your family with whom you live? Do you get the same opportunities as other members of the family in the household? Responses to related questions were that twenty-two out of the twenty-three were saying that they felt welcomed in their families when they had just returned from the bush. And these same people felt that they received the same opportunity as other relatives in the household:

"I am staying well with my family, no problem. (…) I get the same opportunities [as other members of the family]."[101]

Ojok returned from the bush six months ago and states about his family:

"[My family] warmly welcomed me [when I came home], [they gave me] food and a house to sleep. We are staying well (…) and they love me very much."[102]

The following respondent, Opio, returned home seven years ago:

"Life within the family is fine, because we do most of the family work together. And if I am lacking things, I go to my mother and my mother can give [it to me]. And also my sister she can also give [things to me], so if they need something from me, [I give it to them]. We do it like that."[103]

These quotes show that family acceptance is about welcoming the returnee home, supporting him or her at the arrival and helping each other when needed in the long-term contact. Besides family acceptance another protective factor came forward, namely community acceptance. As is already discussed in chapter two and in current chapter, community members can be unwelcoming to returnees which can have a negative psychosocial impact on the returnee. Besides the negative impact of the

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[101] Interview with Ajok, FAP, Gwengdiya, 8 April 2011

[102] Interview with Ojok, FAP, Gwengdiya, 12 April 2011

[103] Interview with Opio, FAP, Gwengdiya, 6 May 2011

community, community members can also be welcoming and acceptant to the returnees, which can lead to positive impacts on the psychosocial adjustment of a returnee. According to Corbin reintegration into the community is as important as reintegration into the family (2008: 317) and Betancourt and colleagues stated that community support reduced the risk for psychosocial maladjustment (2010: 1090).

Among my respondents, all the male respondents were accepted by the community with exceptions from some community members who are jealous of them (due to the earlier mentioned reasons). The female returnees were mainly suffering from discrimination by former husbands or other men, but were however, also accepted by other community members and could participate in the community activities, except for two women (with unknown reasons according to these two female FACs). Activities that were brought up by my respondents which are done in the community are repairing the roads, cleaning the roadsides, digging, and traditional dances.[104] This acceptance can explain the on average high scores on pro-social behaviour, confidence and low scores on being hostile.

Besides community acceptance, it also came forward that *opportunities for livelihood* contributed to a positive impact on the psychosocial adjustment among the returnees. Returnees, who went through reception centres before they came back to the community, often received vocational skills training (i.e. carpentry, sewing, construction work). These skills trainings give the returnee the opportunity to build up his or her life when returning to the community by earning money and having confidence because he or she is catching up with life, like other age-mates are doing who were not abducted. In others words, the returnee is less behind on knowledge and skills compared to non-abducted people (Baines 2005: 36; Betancourt et al 2008: 26-27). The following quote illustrates how support and a skills training can improve a returnee's life:

"Now the life in the family is really good, because I got support from War Affected Children's Association (WACA), they trained me on counselling, and then they gave for me the skills training. I have my sewing machine in Gwengdiya, any time I can go there and make a little bit of money. And also they form a group and I am the leader of the group, and through that I am getting in touch with many organizations who some of them are giving me support, not

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[104] Interview with Ocora, FAP, Gwengdiya, 8 April 2011

all to me. Like for example we have Life Transforming Programme by Care, where they give for us the goats.''[105]

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the degree of psychosocial adjustment of FACs. A difference between the level of anxiety and depression experienced by female and male returnees is found. It came forward that formerly abducted women are experiencing more depressed and anxious feelings than formerly abducted men. The other three subscales pro-social behaviour, confidence and hostility were all equally experienced by female and male returnees. Pro-social behaviour and confidence were on average always experienced by both groups, and hostile feelings were on average never experienced by the returnees.

There are several determinants of these psychosocial adjustment outcomes. Firstly, the difference between female and male FACs can be ascribed to the fact that women are more often victims of acts of stigmatisation compared to male FACs which leads to feelings of depression among the female FACs. This is similar to the findings in chapter two, female FACs tend to be stigmatised by their former husbands and/or other men. According to the social stress theory this discriminatory behaviour leads to a decrease in social, which on his turn influences the internal and external resources, which have an impact on the psychosocial adjustment of the returnee. These findings were related to the psychosocial adjustment according to my respondents, but however, which did not significantly come forward in the results of the questionnaire, is that lack of education and physical injuries were re-occurring subjects brought up by the respondents, which they associated with unhappy feelings. Determinants for the positive outcomes for both groups can be explained by the family and community acceptance and support that returnees experience while living home or in the community. The third determinant is the livelihood opportunities that respondents received either during their stay in the reception centres or through other projects by the government or NGO's. This livelihood opportunity gives the respondents future prospect and reduces the gap between returnee and civilian age-mates, which contribute to pro-social and confident feelings.

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[105] Interview with Opio, FAP, Gwengdiya, 6 May 2011

Conclusion

Research is scant on the role of the post-conflict factor stigma on the reintegration process and the psychosocial adjustment of returnees. I have completed this research to fill the research gap by examining the role of stigma among FACs in northern Uganda. This makes this research of added value to the existing literature on reintegration and the well-being of returnees. In this thesis I have analysed the reintegration process of the returnees, secondly I looked at the forms of stigma experienced by the returnees and thirdly the degree of psychosocial adjustment has been investigated of the returnees. These three concepts have excessively been analysed and presented in this thesis. Looking at the outcomes of these three themes and taking the information together, the central research question: *"what is the role of stigma in the reintegration and the psychosocial adjustment of returnees in northern Uganda?"* can be answered. First I will give a brief overview of the outcomes of the three concepts, which will be followed by an answer to the central research question.

Chapter one focused on the reintegration of the returnees in their families and communities. Reintegration takes place through non-traditional and traditional mechanisms that lead to a reconstruction of the identity boundaries which lie between the FACs and the family and community members. In this chapter it is argued that FACs have to deconstruct their identity as a 'soldier' by being related to a particular surrounding, also known as 'community of practice'. This deconstruction starts either or both in a reception centre and at home. Reception centres focus amongst others on counselling and sensitivity campaigns. At home, welcoming rituals and cleansing rituals are performed to transform the returnee from a polluted returnee into a clean and innocent civilian. The rituals focus on the homecoming of the returnee and on cleansing and freeing the returnee from *cen*. Interventions that contribute to the reintegration of the returnee in the community, are done by elders who organise meetings where sensitisation and reunification with the returnee and the community members take place.

The second chapter focused on the phase after reintegration. The question that was looked at was: when the returnee is reintegrated in the family and the community through the non-traditional and traditional mechanisms, is the post-conflict factor *stigma* present in the lives of these returnees? From the collected data, I

could see that the welcoming home rituals and the cleansing ceremonies were done in order for the returnee to come home and to be accepted in the family, however, since reintegration is a process, it takes time for a returnee to fully reintegrate and participate in the community. This came explicitly forward in the interviews. The first period of living in the community respondents experienced discrimination because they were feared and mistrusted. Also jealousy from community members, that these returnees had come back from the bush but their children did not come back, led to discriminatory acts. Through time this discrimination decreased and merely all the returnees were accepted by the community. However, one group stood out which is currently still stigmatised. Stigmatisation is currently experienced by female FACs who came back from the bush either pregnant or with one or more children. Stigmatisation is committed by community members; in this case mainly the former husbands and other men. And the stigmatisation is not performed by family members. Forms of stigma that are experienced are indirect; indirect in the sense that these women are socially excluded by men from being their wives.

The third and last chapter focused on the psychosocial adjustment of the returnees. The goal of this chapter was to explore the degree of psychosocial adjustment and to examine the determinants of these outcomes. Psychosocial adjustment is divided into four subscales, namely anxiety and depression, pro-social behaviour, confidence and hostility. From the results came that female FACs are the people who on average experience 'sometimes' feelings of anxiety and depression. Male FACs experience on average never experience feelings of anxiety and depression. On the other three subscales all results are similar between male and female returnees: pro-social behaviour and confidence are always experienced on average and hostility is never on average experienced. The fact that female FACs experience feelings of anxiety and depression; comes from the fact that this group suffers from exclusion by their former husbands and/or other men. The positive outcomes on the other three sub-scales can be related to the protective and resilience factors of mainly family support and acceptance, community acceptance and opportunities for livelihood, i.e. receiving vocational skills training.

Taking all the results from the above mentioned chapters together, I can come to a conclusion to my main research question: the post-conflict factor stigma plays a role in the reintegration and psychosocial adjustment of female returnees. We have

seen that through the reintegration mechanisms (i.e. the rituals and the sensitisation meetings) returnees are no longer perceived by their families and by the community members that they are 'soldiers' or 'rebels', but are cleansed through which they received the identity of 'civilian' again. The first reaction of community members, as shown in chapter two, was mainly one of fear and distrust, however after the rituals and the 'time factor' these forms of stigma (through labelling and prejudices) reduced and/or disappeared from my respondents, with an exception of the formerly abducted women who came back pregnant or with children.

Stigma is currently still experienced by female returnees who came back from the bush either pregnant or with children. They are perceived as being sexually impure due to the fact that they already have children from another man. This label leads to socially exclusion of these women, which leads to stress of the female FACs and to feelings of anxiety and depression. This group of women is facing difficulties to earn money, which consequently leads to having problems paying the children to school and getting enough money for food. These female returnees explain that a life without a husband is difficult, because you have to take care of your children alone.[106]

Study limitations must be noted. My findings are limited in their general application to the region of northern Uganda, since I have done research in one parish Gwengdiya, while northern Uganda contains more than forty parishes. The reason for doing research in one parish is of methodological preference, as mentioned in the methodology section. Through my presence in this parish every two days, my intention was to gain trust from these community members in order to have more in-depth interviews which improves the quality of my interviews.

Another limitation is the response bias when talking to community and family members. I have asked them personal questions about their views and perceptions on FACs, since these are moral questions there could be a bias in the replies to my questions. Also I bias could occur due to the fear by the community or family member that because of their answers, their relation with the FAC would worsen. To avoid this bias and the risk for worsening the relation, I have kept my questions as impersonal and general as possible. This made it easier for the community or family member to reply more honestly to my questions on this sensitive matter.

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[106] Interview with Oyella, FAC, Gwengdiya, 3 March 2011

Furthermore focusing on the *adjustment* of returnees can be problematic, since adjustment focuses on the individual deficits and assumes that the FAC is negatively influenced by the participation in war. To become *well* adjusted, the individual needs to go through a process of change. It is a Western notion that FACs are harmed due to exposure to armed conflicts. However, due to the bulk of literature written on the causal relation between psychosocial outcomes (or mental health) and participation of children in war, I have decided to accept the notion that the well-being and the psychosocial functioning of a child is hampered due to these experiences and therefore I use adjustment in this thesis.

Despite these limitations what can be learned from this thesis, is that my findings have a number of programmatic and policy implications about the community stigma that female FACs currently face. In northern Uganda many sensitisation campaigns were set up in the period when FACs returned to their homes and communities. These campaigns took merely place in the period when the returnees came back from the bush and these campaigns did not continue in the period after the LRA had left the country (Betancourt et al. 2010*a*: 18). Therefore as a recommendation northern Uganda should consider reintegration programmes and strategies that focus on the long-term problems that returnees face in the communities and these programmes should invest in *gender specific initials*. Gender-sensitivity campaigns and support programmes may be of additional benefit in situations where female FACs face stigma.

In future research, studies should be done on intervention strategies and programmes on community acceptance to assess the effectiveness of these programmes. Also intervention studies should focus on individual and family acceptance to reinforce the coping strategies and inter-personal relations between the female returnees and people living in their surrounding. These approaches may contribute to the protective and resilience factors in the family and community.

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Appendix

Mean scores of the individual respondents on the Northern-Uganda Child Psychosocial Adjustment Scale (NUCPAS).

Question responses are scored on a 1 – 4 scale, ranging from "never" = 1 "rarely" = 2, "sometimes" = 3, "always" = 4.

Table 1
Psychosocial Adjustment for Female Returnees

N	Anxiety/depression M (*SD*)	Pro-social Behaviour M (*SD*)	Hostility M (*SD*)	Confidence M (*SD*)
1	**2.89 *(1.49)***	4 .00 *(.00)*	1.00 *(.00)*	**3.33 *(1.21)***
2	2.21 *(1.40)*	3.70 *(.95)*	1.00 *(.00)*	3.50 *(1.22)*
3	**3.37 *(1.26)***	**3.30 *(1.24)***	1.00 *(.00)*	3.83 *(.41)*
4	**3.58 *(.96)***	3.70 *(.95)*	1.00 *(.00)*	3.50 *(1.22)*
5	1.74 *(1.28)*	**2.85 *(1.46)***	1.00 *(.00)*	4.00 *(.00)*
6	**2.95 *(1.27)***	3.50 *(1.12)*	1.22 *(.67)*	4.00 *(.00)*
7	**2.74 *(1.24)***	3.65 *(.96)*	1.00 *(.00)*	4.00 *(.00)*
8	2.05 *(1.22)*	3.65 *(.96)*	1.00 *(.00)*	**3.33 *(1.21)***
9	2.00 *(1.29)*	3.70 *(.95)*	1.00 *(.00)*	4.00 *(.00)*

Table 2
Psychosocial Adjustment for Male Returnees

N	Anxiety/depression M (*SD*)	Pro-social Behaviour M (*SD*)	Hostility M (*SD*)	Confidence M (*SD*)
1	1.16 *(.69)*	3.70 *(.95)*	1.00 *(.00)*	3.50 *(1.22)*
2	**2.53 *(1.50)***	3.70 *(.95)*	1.00 *(.00)*	4.00 *(.00)*
3	2.26 *(1.52)*	3.85 *(.69)*	1.00 *(.00)*	**2.83 *(1.47)***
4	2.37 *(1.50)*	3.85 *(.69)*	1.00 *(.00)*	4.00 *(.00)*
5	2.26 *(1.41)*	3.85 *(.69)*	1.00 *(.00)*	3.50 *(1.22)*
6	1.84 *(1.17)*	3.55 *(1.12)*	1.00 *(.00)*	3.50 *(1.22)*
7	1.84 *(1.30)*	4.00 *(.00)*	1.00 *(.00)*	3.00 *(1.55)*
8	**3.05 *(1.43)***	3.70 *(.95)*	1.00 *(.00)*	**3.00 *(1.55)***
9	1.58 *(1.02)*	4.00 *(.00)*	1.00 *(.00)*	3.67 *(.52)*
10	1.74 *(1.15)*	**3.20 *(1.21)***	**1.56 *(1.13)***	4.00 *(.00)*
11	2.32 *(1.11)*	**2.90 *(1.37)***	1.00 *(.00)*	3.83 *(.41)*
12	1.74 *(1.28)*	**3.05 *(1.41)***	1.00 *(.00)*	3.67 *(.52)*
13	1.84 *(1.12)*	**3.05 *(1.41)***	1.22 *(.67)*	3.83 *(.41)*
14	2.26 *(1.19)*	3.20 *(1.34)*	1.00 *(.00)*	3.50 *(.84)*